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# Dancing Together Alone

Inconsistencies and Contradictions of Strategic  
Communication in Swedish Universities

Daniel Lövgren



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### **Abstract**

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Organizations increasingly use communication as a strategic function to maneuver in a challenging, complex, and demanding social landscape. Based on assumptions of centralized control and planning, the strategic communication concept aims for coordination and consistency of communication. Implied is a view of actors as intentional, rational, and deliberate decision makers. Such a conventional view on strategic communication, however, cannot satisfactorily explain the underlying characteristics of communication practices in contemporary organizations. Nor does it explain how organizational members in their everyday work interpret and relate to such practices.

This thesis adopts neo-institutional theory and the translation approach to study how strategic communication operates along an institutionalized recipe for communication that through various translations is reformulated to fit local organizational contexts and preferences of the people occupying these contexts. To illustrate the process of both following and adapting the institutionalized recipe of strategic communication, qualitative and quantitative material on the role of social media in sixteen Swedish universities are examined. The material is generated and gathered through an ethnographically inspired approach and includes: interviews, a six-month observation period, the study of documents, and a content analysis of Vice-Chancellor blogs.

The findings show that work with social media is pervaded with inconsistencies and contradictions, but simultaneously relating to a shared recipe for communication. Shared elements for communication at the universities include the *purposes* for communication, notion of *one* university and *integration*. However, in translations people rely on local organizational conditions, personal values, ambitions, and experiences. This produces tensions between: control and independence, centralization and decentralization, and one voice and multiple voices. The findings suggest that translations differ across universities and between communicators on different levels, some being more “true” to the recipe than others. Thus, differences are inevitable, underscoring the issues of managing and controlling communication in the conventional approach of strategic communication. As a result, the empirical and theoretical concept of strategic communication benefits from acknowledging its social embeddedness and local recontextualization.

Strategic communication is like dancing to music. Everyone hears the music, but the dance varies with each dancer’s experiences, ambitions, and opportunities.

*Keywords:* Strategic communication, Social Media, Neo-Institutional Theory, Translations, Universities, Inconsistencies

*Daniel Lövgren, Department of Informatics and Media, Kyrkogårdsg. 10, Uppsala University, SE-751 20 Uppsala, Sweden.*

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*Till morfar*



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Uppsala/Örebro, October 2017

Daniel Lövgren



# Abbreviations

Andromeda University	AU
Centaurus University	CU
Blekinge Institute of Technology	BTH
KTH Royal Institute of Technology	KTH
Karlstad University	KAU
Karolinska Institutet	KI
Linköping University	LIU
Linnæus University	LNU
Lund University	LU
Malmö University	MAH
Mid Sweden University	MIUN
Mälardalen University	MDH
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences	SLU
Stockholm University	SU
Umeå University	UMU
University of Borås	HIB
University of Gothenburg	GU
University of Skövde	HIS
Uppsala University	UU
Örebro University	ÖRU
Vice-Chancellor	VC
Communication Department	CD
Vice-Chancellor blog	VC blog





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# PART I - INTRODUCTION



# 1. Strategic Communication: Beyond Assumptions

I ARRIVE ON March 13, 2014 and it is the first day of my fieldwork at the university<sup>1</sup>. I meet with Maja<sup>2</sup> in the morning to talk about the university's social media work. We sit down in her office and she tells me about how their activities in social media commenced with the start of a Facebook group in 2009 as part of the annual "University Days", an event aimed at student recruitment. She describes their contemporary activities on Twitter, Facebook, and the other social media platforms where they have accounts. She is most excited, however, to talk about her plans to develop the university's presence on Instagram. The university has an official presence on Instagram – said to be representing the university as a whole – where Maja alone has posted most of the pictures. Her plan is to develop and improve their activities by re-assigning operational control of the account to a rotation of students. She is currently awaiting an answer from the Communication director before activating the plan.

[...]

When I arrive to the university's communication department in the morning a few days later, Maja meets me in the corridor, announcing that she has just gotten permission to proceed from the Communication director on her Instagram project. She has already prepared some students for the launch, with the aim to start in the coming week. Later that day at one of the department's regular working group meetings, Maja presents the project and shares with her colleagues that the inspiration for the change comes from a project by the Swedish Institute<sup>3</sup> on Twitter, where a Swedish citizen is selected to represent the country one week at a time via the handle *@sweden*. At the meeting, Maja also presents guidelines that she has developed for the Instagramming students, where, for example, it is instructed that the students are to start their week by taking a "selfie" and write a short introductory text about themselves<sup>4</sup>. One of the other communicators and meeting participants raises a question about potential legal issues. She mentions hate speech as a potential problem, but they quickly agree that the issue in question is minor.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 4 for an overview of selection and anonymization of universities, employees, and students.

<sup>2</sup> "Maja" was the communicator responsible for social media at Andromeda University (the social media specialist).

<sup>3</sup> The Swedish Institute launched the project "Curators of Sweden" where one Swede per week leads the official Swedish Twitter account (*@sweden*). <http://curatorsofsweden.com>

<sup>4</sup> Guidelines for Instagram, Andromeda University

They do not discuss the project further and Maja continues to prepare the project on her own.

[...]

The following day Maja shares the Instagram guidelines with me, although she points out that they are not yet finalized. Nevertheless, she will share the unfinished guidelines with the students, with the aim to develop them as the project proceeds. On this day, she also shares her view on the purpose of the project, which is about changing the account from “being boring when it only contains photos of the same old tree”, to a presentation of a “truthful, vivid, and close-up picture of what the university is all about”. The students she has contacted and prepared are previously recruited as student ambassadors<sup>5</sup>, a group she is already acquainted with and used to “set the tone”. She has considered the risks of letting go of control, but points out that at the same time she does not want to control them because of the way social media works and should be operated.

[...]

It is April and almost a month into my fieldwork. The Instagram account has now been headed by two students during a week each, and is currently operated by a third student. Maja notes that the purpose of the project and the Instagram account has become clearer to her since its inception, and that “the idea is to share the life of a student. And well, it is mainly about student recruitment, which now is obvious. First. we just followed a trend.”

[...]

In April, I sit down to talk with the newly hired communication strategist, Emma, who shares her views on the university’s communication. In particular, she discusses the social media work, describing it as a vision of greater integration. “Maja does not have enough time. I want social media to become a natural part of the university’s overall communication. What she does on Twitter or Instagram represents the whole university. The vision I have is that the communication department should integrate all output: the web, debate articles, social media, etc.”

[...]

It is early June and I have spent about three months at the university. I meet with the student currently operating the university’s Instagram account. We sit down for a coffee, so she can share her views of the project. “I got guidelines before I started, but I have based my Instagram work on my everyday life as a student. What I show is up to me, and the guidelines are also really up to me to decide.” She continued, “The purpose is rather vague. Maybe we should write in English? I’m also thinking that I represent both the

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<sup>5</sup> “Student ambassadors” are students hired by the university to aid and accompany the university and Maja on different student recruitment activities.

university and the city. I should bring this up with Maja. It should be evaluated.”

## Through a Strategic Communication Lens

The illustrative excerpts above are from fieldwork at Andromeda University<sup>6</sup>; as such, they represent glimpses of what is said and done in the communication work at diverse levels of a university. The examples are drawn from the work related to the university’s official social media accounts, particularly representing activities and operations in relation to Instagram (though all types of social media are included in this study). The university’s communication strategist (Emma), a representative of the university management, presents a view of all university communication to be *coordinated* to create and communicate a unified organization. This is also a centralized notion in the university’s communication policy, further complemented by concepts such as *efficiency*, *strategic*, *tool*, and *brand*:

The academic landscape and the conditions for the country’s universities are continuously changing. Andromeda University is now, and in the future, facing challenges that demand coordinated and high competence in the communication area. Competition is increasing for research funding, students, and when it comes to recruiting coworkers. A coordinated, effective, and long-term communication work is therefore a strategic tool for the university. The purpose is to strengthen Andromeda University’s brand in accordance with the ambitions of our educational, research, and collaboration strategies. [...] The communication department is responsible for the university’s overarching internal and external communication.<sup>7</sup>

In the communication policy the communication department is assigned the responsibility for the university’s communication, which includes social media planning and activities. Hence, the notion of a *centralized* communication management - to be “a strategic tool” - is present in the policy document. Visible in both Emma’s words and in the policy, we can understand social media as subordinate to central planning and responsibility. Related to this, Maja’s work with Instagram reflects managerial ideas, as demonstrated in the planning of the account to be more “truthful”, when waiting for the approval of the project from the Communication director, and in the production of guidelines for the

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<sup>6</sup> The dissertation consists of two interrelated empirical parts. In the second part (a fieldwork at two universities) the names of two selected universities and their employees are anonymized. These two universities, Andromeda University and Centaurus University, are further presented in Chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> Excerpt from the communication policy of Andromeda University. Approved by the university board in 2009 and operational at the time of the field study in 2014. Translated from Swedish to English by the author.

Instagramming students. Maja also contemplates over purpose of the project: according to her, she wants to show it as a more “truthful” picture of the university to aid in student recruitment.

These examples contain concepts and notions central to the strategic communication literature, its practice, and to this thesis. For example, the *integration of communication* is a concept emphasizing how an organization ought to coordinate and align functions and messages in one consistent voice (c.f., Aberg, 1990; Christensen, Firat, & Torp, 2008; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b). In the example above, the idea of coordinated communication is encountered in the communication policy and underlined by the communication strategist. However, integration and coordination are contradicted in the Instagram project. The social media specialist, Maja, for instance, is contemplating the level of control of the students on Instagram, where she has produced guidelines to govern operations. However, the student reports that the guidelines are overlooked in favor of her own views and that the purpose of the project is unclear. The communication strategist, Emma, acknowledges that Maja has too little time to oversee all activities, but that coordinated communication is a goal. From the policy descriptions of communication and the student’s work, Instagram can be understood as adopted and used inconsistently. The student is talking about her independence; Maja is managing Instagram in an accepting and almost experimental approach, inspired by a trend, however, seeking control through producing guidelines; and Emma reflects on notions of managerial coordination, notions that are established and presented in the communication policy. From the Instagram project, we also identify that work with social media is considered a *management responsibility*, reflecting how centralized control of communication is considered an imperative in strategic communication (c.f., Argenti, Howell, & Beck, 2005). The responsibility for the university’s communication is in the communication policy located at the communication department. However, planning and working with social media are ascribed to Maja, who had to await final approval from the Communication director before initiating the new project. The Communication director’s role, on the other hand, was merely to approve or not and therefore not a significantly active part of its planning or execution. Accordingly, the project is wholly associated to the initiative and work of Maja. The project was discussed at a department meeting, where only a brief discussion of legal issues took place. Therefore, the responsibility is solely Maja’s. The student’s role becomes significant as she represents the university on Instagram, and while the responsibility lies with Maja, the operational responsibility is the student’s. Indeed, operations do not seem to be aligned to the guidelines but to the motives and impulses of the student. While Maja balances control and an idea of letting go of control “because of the way social media works”, it also contradicts the



content of the communication policy and the vision of the communication strategist.

The examples raise questions that challenge central pillars and concepts of strategic communication. Hence, can strategic communication be understood as a *centralized management function*, implying *control* and *planning* with expected outcomes? Is it possible to understand organizations and the communication of organizations as a coordinated whole speaking in one voice? This introduction has shown the presence of assumptions of how to work with communication in a university setting, although, appearing difficult to introduce and manage, and perhaps even present misleading notions of communication. For example, when talking to practitioners, it is not uncommon to encounter such statements as, “but we *are* one organization”, referring to a belief of the appropriateness and possibility to work towards coordinated messages and communication. The problem identified and the approach taken in this work regard the presence of strategic communication concepts and practices, which simultaneously play out in contradictory and inconsistent ways. I refer to the shared assumptions of what communication in and to organizations is, and how it should be done, as *conventional* strategic communication. This perspective provides answers and explanations that help us understand an organization’s communication from a managerial perspective, where planning and decisions are to be implemented for a desired result. Yet, our understanding of strategic communication can be supported by further theoretical and empirical elaboration addressing the context of shared assumptions coexisting with contradictions and inconsistencies. To elaborate and contribute to present understandings and arguments, a brief overview of the conventional perspective of strategic communication together with its central issues and problems is presented. Neo-institutional theory and a translation approach are introduced to elaborate the study of the phenomenon beyond a conventional understanding.

## Challenging and Elaborating the Conventional Perspective

Contemporary organizations of all types - be they corporations, public administrations, or non-profit associations - operate in an increasingly complex and challenging environment (Cornelissen, 2011). In this context, strategic communication is presented to provide necessary and relevant answers to help organizations navigate and deal with the development. To strategically plan and perform communication is a way to reduce uncertainties and increase organizational trustworthiness. The introductory illustrations can be understood as representing a few of the central aspects of

a conventional perspective on strategic communication. *Integrated communication* and a consequent location of communication as a *central management function* to oversee and control an organization's communication in order to contribute to reputation and the organizational brand, and by that aiding organizational goals, are central to a conventional perspective (c.f., Christensen, Morsing, & Cheney, 2008; Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015a). The responsibility to make decisions, plan, and execute communication is with senior management and the communication department. Responsibilities and roles of communication practitioners has also been demarcated as either strategist or technician, where former govern the work of the latter (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The work includes producing governing documents, crafting of organizational values and messages, and the coordination of work to attain set goals. Within this perspective, there is a premiering of locally conditioned decision making, which would position communication as a function intentionally used to deal with issues and situations that are identified as problematic or challenging to the organization. This can be illustrated by the widespread definition of strategic communication by Hallahan et al. (2007, p. 3). The authors define it as the “purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission”, suggesting an instrumental view of communication (however, Hallahan and colleagues also argue for strategic communication as emerging and moving beyond the instrumental perspective). From this perspective, strategic communication is an intentional, and consequently, *planned* way to address many of the current organizational challenges. The centrality of strategic communication is assumed to have a position of providing organizations and communicators a legitimized “thought structure” regarding how to work with communication (c.f., Suchman, 1995; Tench, Verhoeven, & Zerfass, 2009, p. 162).

In the context and field of studies on organizations' communication, there are several perspectives that address those issues identified in conventional strategic communication. For example, studies have used a postmodernist approach to analyze communication practices as hegemonic devices (Holtzhausen, 2002), or adopted to center on strategic communication from a *strategy as practice* perspective (Svensson, 2016). Lately, the *CCO* perspective (communication constitutes organizations) have gained prominence, emphasizing micro interactions and discursive practices in organizing or in the shaping of organizations (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011). The *CCO* perspective assumes a view of communication as not being something an organization does, but something that is the fundament of organizations and their activities. Thus, what an organization says or what it does is interlinked in the organizing process (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). The *constitutive* view of communication, excellently represented in the *CCO* perspective, challenges

the conventional *transmission* view by understanding communication as a social process instead of an instrument, which sees organizations as socially emerging and constituted entities (Craig, 1999). This is a growing field, located in the intersection of communication and organization studies. However, the CCO perspective does not emphasize the institutional context and social embeddedness of organizations and their communication, a focus that has only recently taken off and elaborated in organizational communication studies (see Wakefield, 2008). An institutional approach to the study of strategic communication builds on a social-constructivist view (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), recognizing the presence of socially embedded and shared ideas, norms, and practices of communication (such as the integration of communication). The approach also offers a way to explain the local variations of communication practices as an outcome of translations performed by each individual actor. In this way, it offers an approach to understand how contradictions and inconsistencies of communication practices arise and develop in organizations. Thus, inspired by studies from Zerfass (2009), Frandsen and Johansen (2009), Sandhu (2009), and Fredriksson, Pallas, and Wehmeier (2013), a neo-institutional view is adopted to study strategic communication. According to Sandhu (2009, p. 73), the neo-institutional view offers “a detour from a rational-choice or managerial perspective and stresses the influence of institutional frameworks on organizations”. Put differently, an analysis of the role of social media in universities’ communication contributes to an understanding of strategic communication, both as an outcome of pressures from the social environment and context, and because of interpretations and work inside organizations by individuals with different ambitions, experiences, positions, and access to resources. The present dissertation moves away from a managerial perspective to broaden the view, but not dismissing the influence of such.

The neo-institutional perspective has increasingly received attention within strategic communication research to expand beyond managerial perspectives. The neo-institutional approach offers the possibility to study strategic communication as an outcome of social embeddedness and influences on organizations from social pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991b; Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby, & Sahlin-Andersson, 2008; John W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In this view, strategic communication is a “recipe” for how organizations ought to work with communication. Research in this emerging field of research tends to either study how concepts, ideas, and models of strategic communication are shared among organizations (for example Swerling & Sen, 2009; Tench et al., 2009), or how the concepts are interpreted and made operational in local contexts (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2009; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2015; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010). Nonetheless, this work seeks to strike a balance between the two by studying both shared assumptions and motives for using strategic communication

(macro level) and the local interpretations (micro level) on all organizational levels (Radaelli & Sitton Kent, 2016) in order to address the issue of how strategic communication does not turn out as expected in organizational practices. The framework for such an endeavor is borrowed from the Scandinavian school of neo-institutional theory, namely that of *translations* (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996, 2005). A translation perspective acknowledges the social embeddedness of organizations and management ideas while emphasizing the individual actors and how they cope with (in this case) the pressures of the strategic communication recipe. Strategic communication in this thesis is thus viewed as an institutionalized recipe providing a structure and guidance for communication work in all types of organization, however, given its shape by each individual that engages the recipe in the ongoing communication work of local organizational context. Through this approach, the present thesis discusses the dilemma of the relation between structure and agency by contributing to an understanding of the processes and outcomes of the inconsistencies of talk and action of communication in contemporary organizations (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Brunsson, 2003; John W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The theoretical foundation, together with the identified issues and problems, is elaborated in Chapter 2, followed by a detailed description of neo-institutional theory and the translation perspective in Chapter 3.

## Context: Swedish Universities, Communication, and Social Media

Placing the above-presented challenges into the empirical context of this thesis, the adoption and use of social media in Swedish universities does not only offer a possibility to study the relations and tensions of structure (assumptions) and agency (localized interpretations), and inconsistencies of strategic communication in organizations, but also the role of communication in universities and of social media within a strategic communication framework. The thesis operates at an intersection of interests, where communication in and by universities presents a context that is yet to be further explored and where social media, from the outlook of strategic communication, challenges established ways of communication. The chosen organizational context is Swedish higher education and, its universities in particular<sup>8</sup>, a context with specific conditions, necessary to address to situate the study. Universities in Sweden operate as public-sector

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<sup>8</sup> In the neo-institutional concepts of *sector* or *field* other organizations could be included (e.g., the central higher education authority or unions related to the universities). Hence, a limitation is enforced to focus solely on the universities to provide a more comprehensive and specific case.

organizations, which are driven by an institutional logic of its own that produces a frame for how universities and their communication are to be structured and performed. The ideas and norms of strategic communication may then be viewed as encountering an environment with its own legitimized forms for communication. Accordingly, it is possible to consider the study of strategic communication in universities as a critical case: in other words, the presence of the strategic communication recipe in universities would underline the pervasive institutional power, which can also expand to different organizations in the public sector. Yet, as shown below, universities operate in a changing context, not least one striving towards the development of its intentional communication to become competitive. It is therefore both a reasonable and relevant case to study. Likewise, it may be argued that social media produces challenges to strategic communication, especially dichotomies such as centralization-decentralization. Based on similar reasoning, social media within a strategic communication framework may be understood as challenging to strategic communication as an institutionalized concept, one that thus provides an applicable mode to study strategic communication. However, it is neither social media nor the universities *per se* that are of central interest; rather, of central concern is a context that could provide a fitting empirical case to study strategic communication.

Higher education worldwide is in a constant state of change, moving towards an intensified work with communication (c.f., Wæraas & Maor, 2014). In Sweden, a recent surge of research has centered on university governance (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016; Wedlin & Pallas, 2017), university auditing systems (Engwall, 2016), and university values and role in society (Ahläck Öberg, Bennich-Björkman, Hermansson, & Jarstad, 2016). Closely related to universities and communication is the process of *marketization*, also understood as a result of the changes resulting from the development described as *new public management* (Engwall, 2007; Hood, 1991; Wedlin, 2008). The general development has also been described as a struggle between forces of state, academy, and the market, where the latter is gaining prominence (Clark, 1986). This struggle is visible in the competition among universities for resources, researchers, students, university branding, and the ambition for a higher ranking and better reputation. In Sweden, the higher education reform of 1977 has been described as formative for universities and the growing attention to competitiveness and activities in creating “unique” profiles (Askling, 2012). Thus, while traits from the corporate world are making their way into universities, communication has become a central strategic function (Engwall, 2008). For example, Wæraas and Solbakk (2009) studied the complex and problematic issues of branding in higher education, but also concepts such as identity, reputation and uniqueness, visibility, and rankings have been investigated (c.f., Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009; Drori, Delmestri, & Oberg, 2013; Furey, Springer, &

Parsons, 2014; Hazelkorn, 2011; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Sataøen, 2014; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2016; Steiner, Sundström, & Sammalisto, 2013). This research reflects a development in which communication is taking a leading role in universities, so that they become conspicuous and address a perceived increasingly competitive context.

In this dissertation work, the study of universities is viewed as providing a particular case with particular conditions (see for example Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016a). A different empirical setting, for example the health care sector, would provide a similarly interesting and relevant canvas for the topic and this study, hence the results are pertinent to discuss in a broader organizational context. As pointed out above, universities operate in an institutionalized, albeit changing, context that provides a critical case, i.e. if strategic communication materializes here, we may expect similar developments and processes to unfold in other sectors as well. Central to my case is the assumption that strategic communication, as an institutionalized idea and practice, accommodates to organizations and sectors in a similar fashion, but how it is made meaningful is dependent on the local context wherein it is translated. For this reason, the universities provide a unique setting that needs to be approached and understood in its own right because of the developing significance of communication in the sector and the established ways of doing things. Although unrelated to the central inquiry, a further argument to study communication in universities is its changing role to a central and increasingly important organizational function with which growing resources are distributed. A discussion on the findings from the empirical context is therefore warranted and a contribution of the thesis.

The decision to center social media as a case to study strategic communication is based on the growth and use not only among private users but also as part of its explosive entrance into organizations' communication. Arguments to adopt and use social media often comprise their transformative and democratizing character, including the potential to decentralize control, enable interactivity, transparency, dialogue and two-way symmetric communication, and eventually egalitarian relations between organizations and their stakeholders (c.f., Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Kent, 2013; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Other activities, ideas, or concepts of strategic communication could have been made central as cases for this study (e.g., campaigning, Svensson, 2016). However, because social media both represents new types of communication channel and innovative ideas (posing as potential challenges to conventional strategic communication, e.g., decentralization), they present a case for which the "newness" can be seen to further challenge the institutionalized form of strategic communication. As such, social media provides the study with a useful case for the overall purpose of the dissertation. In relation to strategic communication, the question of how the "open, uncontrolled practices of social media" (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012, p. 287) are translated in

organizations is noteworthy in relation to the efforts to integrate communication and the related notions of management and control.

## Purpose and Research Questions

Studies on the institutional conditions of strategic communication first emerged during the past decade (see for example Wakefield, 2008; Ansgar Zerfass, 2009) and the approach has only recently been recognized among a growing number of scholars. As noted above, in this initial phase studies have been conceptual in nature or convey an empirical perspective dealing with either the presence of shared concepts among organizations or the activities within organizations. This implies that few studies have addressed the meeting of the shared assumptions of communication and the micro level interactions to generate aggregated insights of what constitutes strategic communication as a social phenomenon in organizations. As the introductory example of Instagram suggests, there are external influences, shared assumptions, and localized interpretations of communication at play when the role of social media is shaped. This generates a context of similarities and differences operating alongside each other. Consequently, the research interest and purpose are to identify the shared assumptions of strategic communication, with the primary aim to study differences in terms of contradictions and inconsistencies in the understandings and practices of communication. Thus far, the strategic communication literature does not offer an extensive, albeit increasingly developing, understanding of how these differences and similarities are created, shaped, and their role in organizations. To adopt a neo-institutional theory and the translation perspective is a suitable theoretical framework to approach the problem by centering the analysis on how actors individually make sense of social media relative to the influence of strategic communication as a socially constructed recipe for communication. The adoption and use of social media as communication channels by Swedish universities provide the empirical canvas, and what managers and communicators write, say, and do provide material to analyze the seemingly contradictory and inconsistent nature of organizations' strategic communication.

Based on the identified problems in strategic communication, the purpose here is to present an empirically driven analysis and understanding of how strategic communication is variously operationalized by communicators in the universities in relation to the institutional context and pressures. Such an analysis is achieved by studying the translations of shared assumptions for communication, reflected in the role of social media in Swedish universities. Two research questions (RQs) are proposed. The first question is descriptive and examines the shared assumptions and presence of strategic communication as a recipe for all organizational communication (in this case

it is specifically aimed at social media). The second question pertains to how social media is translated into use in the universities.

RQ1: What are the shared assumptions and characteristics of strategic communication that permeates the role of social media in Swedish universities?

RQ2: How are the shared assumptions of strategic communication translated into individual descriptions and local activities in the adoption and use of social media by Swedish universities?

The two research questions are constructed to study how communication practices, that are embedded in broader, complex, and contradictory institutional settings, are made functional despite inconsistencies. The two questions are theoretically founded to help guide the empirical approach of the study. Two empirical components support the thesis: I) the shared assumptions of communication are studied through the views, perceptions, and reflections by senior and central representatives from 16 Swedish universities on the role of social media as a broader phenomenon (Chapter 5) and the role of the Vice-Chancellor blog as a focused phenomenon (Chapter 6), and II) a fieldwork conducted at two selected universities to study translations of these shared assumptions in everyday contexts (Chapter 7). Following the introduction, a theoretical section presents and defines the central issues in strategic communication. In addition, the approach of the neo-institutional framework is presented that includes the steps in the research process on how to go about and perform a project that answers the research questions. In line with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the theoretical perspectives, this research adopts a social constructivist position. As is more closely illustrated in the method chapter of the thesis (Chapter 4), the study is operationalized by embracing a qualitative approach. The study consists of a multi-method design that comprises open-ended and semi-structured interviews, observations, and an analysis of documents. Moreover, a quantitative study is performed on the content in Vice-Chancellor blogs. Methodological inspiration is derived from ethnography and thus the study aims to understand the organizational actors in their “natural” environment, although both “naturally occurring data” and “constructed data” are generated (Silverman, 2011). The thesis refrains from drawing on a predefined theoretical framework when entering the organizations. Instead, theory as sensitizing concepts is kept in mind during the fieldwork and analysis. In the second empirical part (Chapter 7), the role of social media was studied following a *shadowing of objects* approach (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007), in which employees and their relations to the official social media accounts were identified and continuously included. The fieldwork departed from current *active* and



*official* university social media accounts, representing the university as organization in an official capacity (e.g., “@university” on Twitter), or accounts for official functions and roles (e.g., a VC blog). This means that accounts of, for example, individual researchers were not included.

In the following two chapters, the notions of the conventional perspective on strategic communication, its issues and suggestions for development are examined further. In addition, the neo-institutional research in strategic communication studies is evaluated to look deeper into the theoretical and practical challenges of the developing field, as well as to prepare an analytical ground for the empirical story. The subsequent chapter describes the methodological approach and methods, as well as the empirical context. The next three chapters contain the empirical findings. The final two chapters further engages the findings to develop an analysis and discussion on the practical and theoretical implications for strategic communication, and examine the institutional understanding of the contradictory and inconsistent condition of strategic communication.



## 2. Conventions, Issues, and an Alternative Approach to Strategic Communication

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION CAN be understood as a concept eclipsing and embodying disciplines that focus on communication and organizations and as a concept for organizations' deliberate communication practices (c.f. Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b). Thus, it has emerged as a dominant approach to make sense of the conditions for communication and how organizations ought to organize, plan, and execute communication activities and the organizational structures in which it takes place. *Strategy* is hence central to strategic communication, referring to prescriptive processes where intentional goal formulation and implementation are proposed and to emergent perspectives that acknowledge that strategy develops over time (Frandsen & Johansen, 2015). The prescriptive approach to strategy represents a dominating understanding in strategic communication that is based on a transmission view of communication (c.f. Shannon & Weaver, 1949). In the present work, this is referred to as a *conventional* perspective of strategic communication. Thus, strategic communication is often understood and studied from a managerial perspective, directing attention to what is described as rational decision making and a top-down implementation of activities in organizations. Foci include the intentional use of communication to support organizational goals and how communication is purposefully applied in organizational-stakeholder relationships (Argenti et al., 2005; Hallahan et al., 2007). In such approaches, the notion of *integrated communication* is central and has emerged as a guiding principle for how to understand the structuring of, and work with, communication, including its purposes. Integration mainly rests on a managerial perspective in which control of communication is related to its centralization to a communication department and the influence of senior management in order to achieve a coordinated organization that communicates consistent messages (Cornelissen, 2011). The managerial perspective has dominated the research field and communication practice, although alternative approaches and understandings are emerging and growing rapidly, rejecting linear understandings that imply control of communication and organization. Today, the generally accepted understanding is a constitutive view of communication that focuses on how meanings are co-constructed (Craig,

1999). There are still issues and problems in need of further analysis in strategic communication and those are addressed in this chapter.

The chapter starts with a brief historical overview to situate the study and then presents conventional strategic communication and its central characteristics and view on the nature of communication. Thereafter, the discussion centers on how strategic communication is to be operationalized via, for example, the role of strategic documents, its organizing structure, and roles and responsibilities. The dissertation's problem formulation and the two research questions guide the logic of the chapter. In a concluding section issues on the conventional perspective are addressed together with the presentation of how they may be re-approached through the adoption of a neo-institutional framework.

## Historical Overview and Development

The nature and role of strategy in communication has been discussed for hundreds of years. In his overview of the understanding and role of communication beginning with Plato, through the Middle Ages, and up until today, Torp (2015) draws on Deetz's (1992) understanding of communication as pending between ideals of participation or effectiveness. Torp's conclusion is that communication has historically oscillated between participation and inclusion and effectiveness and control, and that today there is an understanding that nearly all communication is strategic. In the 1920s, Edward Bernays played an essential role in the formulation of how to communicate with (or rather *to*) the masses, building his view on a transmission perspective (Ewen, 1996). In the 1960s, communication became a tool to address social unrest and support the legitimacy of organizations. Cornelissen (2011) saw the 1980s as a turning point when organizations actively engaged strategically in communication activities to position themselves and build their reputation. With the growth of the internet in the 1990s, the stakeholder engagement and participation has since grown in importance and today is paramount to strategic communication (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). With the emerging technologies, so has also the discussion of the redistribution of power from organizations to stakeholders emerged, although with proponents claiming significant changes have occurred there has been a great change (Shirky, 2008), whereas opponents express skepticism (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2014).

Communication by and in relation to organizations have been understood from several disciplines and research traditions: central, however, are organizational communication, public relations, corporate communication, marketing, and corporate branding (c.f., Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011; Falkheimer & Heide, 2014b; Hatch & Schultz, 2008; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2013).

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the *public relations* discipline grew and crucial to its inception and development was James Grunig. In the Excellence studies, (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; L. Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002), the approach to communication in organizations promoted a strategic management function to control the organization and its communication. Key to Grunig's public relations is the distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical communication. Over time the concept was developed and understood as a symmetrical proposition that is not superior or possible to reach, but needing to be balanced with what they call asymmetrical communication.

Christensen, Morsing, et al. (2008) describe how *corporate communication* has its roots in an organizational need for social legitimacy and the search of an organizational soul. However, corporate communication is also in pursuit of publicity, a process starting with the Industrial Revolution. It emerged as an academic discipline in the 1990s, focusing on the strategic management and integration of internal and external communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2014). Cornelissen (2011, p. 5) defined it as "a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favorable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent". Furthermore, Cornelissen reflects on the transmission and the constitutive view of communication and strategy in his identification and acknowledgment of both top-down and bottom-up processes in the communication management. In these descriptions, it seems approaches have been progressive and reflexive. However, others have had more functional approaches: for example, Argenti (1996) premier managerial goal-setting and control, and van Riel and Fombrun (2007) define the discipline as "the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favorable starting points with stakeholders on which the company depends". This view sees corporate communication as an umbrella for communication and management activities (Shelby, 1993). The roots of corporate communication are found in its name, i.e. for the most part it attends to the needs and development of corporations, and not those of public or non-profit organizations.

The latest, and maybe most interesting development in the field, is that of what is generally referred to as *organizational communication*. In the 1960s, it became established as an academic discipline, developing from the perspective of organizations not existing *by*, but *in* communication (Taylor, 1999). Primary to the inquiry has been the influence of social theory, where both Weick (1979) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) have a strong influence. Although organizational communication is often associated with "internal communication", the focus is aimed at how organizations are constituted in communication (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Thus, the

organization is not seen as a container within which communication is approached as an instrument. A key issue since the 1980s has been the development of an interpretive perspective that could contrast previous functionalistic views (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam, 1983). This is referred to as the CCO perspective. There are, however, different approaches to and definitions of CCO. But they all have in common the role of communication in the sense-making processes, drawing on institutionalized formulations and exchanges of communication as expressed in talk and text (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). Communication is therefore recognized as drawing on institutionalized forms of symbolical exchanges between actors, but does not address the concepts of organizational communication as institutionalized.

Accordingly, there are differences in where the disciplines originate and their focus. Another difference lies in the geographical origins, where the American (and Asian) tradition is closely associated with private firms and corporations. In contrast, the European development started with the information activities of public organizations (Falkheimer, 2002; Falkheimer & Heide, 2014a, 2014b; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b). The strategic communication concept has received a stronger embrace in the European context, although the concept is gaining ground worldwide. Whereas public relations and corporate communication (although changing) has more clearly encompassed private organizations, strategic communication is not exclusive, i.e. it is inclusive of all organizational types.

## A Conventional Perspective

Strategic communication is cross disciplinary, drawing interest from disciplines such as sociology and business administration (e.g., Ihlen, Van Ruler, & Fredriksson, 2009). Accordingly, strategic communication cannot be understood in a single definition. However, the work by Hallahan et al. (2007) is often used as a point of departure in communication studies. Cornelissen (2011) presents a definition in which communication as a management function, the coordination of communication, and the purpose of establishing a positive reputation among stakeholders are identified as central elements in communication management. The organizational reputation (and the brand) is the focus for strategic communication and as the result of the integrative efforts of communication management (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014b; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b).

## Central Assumptions

Along with the changing organizational environments, so has the ideas and activities of communication developed from being a production function to moving through the organizational hierarchy and becoming a central

management function and tool in the work for organizational legitimacy and reputation (Falkheimer, 2014b; Holmström, 2005). Given the contemporary context of organizations, the management and planning of communication are of crucial importance in strategic communication (c.f., Argenti et al., 2005; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; L. Grunig et al., 2002; Hallahan et al., 2007). This results in a notion of control (of communication activities and processes) underpinning the understanding of communication, although the field is moving in an interpretive and *emerging* direction (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b). A strategic management of communication, however, implies a course where communication and communication activities perform a function to contribute to and strengthen the organization wherein it is practiced (Mintzberg, 1990). As a result, the potential to plan communication is emphasized, with responsibilities centralized to management and the communication department. Communication in relation to both external and internal stakeholders is regarded as a management responsibility and thus a responsibility in the hands of a few (Mahoney, 2011; Ansgar Zerfass & Huck, 2007). This impacts the organizing of responsibilities and roles and a production of guiding and regulatory documents (such as communication policy and strategy, or vision). Social media, together with other channels, activities and functions related to an organization's communication, are therefore located within the strategic communication framework and a part of a system to support an organization and its goals.

The “strategic imperative” (Argenti et al., 2005) of communication prefers a view of communication as a centralized management function that addresses issues such as organizational legitimacy, reputation, and the brand (Carroll, 2013; Suchman, 1995). Communication (and social media) is in this perspective a consequence understood as intentional and goal-oriented, reflected in the popular definition by Hallahan et al. (2007, p. 3) in which strategic communication is defined as the “purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (see also Hallahan, 2015; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2013). The strategic top-down intentions are hence imperative to contemporary organizations, which implies that control and central management and the planning of communication activities to reach set goals are central in both practice and much research (Frandsen & Johansen, 2015; Torp, 2015). However, the transmission and managerial control perspective is also broadly refuted, and Hallahan et al. (2007) also understands strategic communication as a collaborative and emerging endeavor, although with a point of departure in a “preferred” organizational view without necessarily being manipulative (see also King, 2009). The *collaborative* here nods to the inclusion of stakeholders (internal and external) and is a way for communication and communication activities to move from a previously dominant transmission view of communication to a constitutive perspective on communication in which meanings are co-created

and shaped *in* communication (Craig, 1999). From the constitutive perspective, *strategy* is not acknowledged as a top-down process, but also includes a bottom-up perspective. This perspective proposes that communication is viewed as a constitutive process of meaning creation, which presents organizations and communicators to a more complex reality than previously acknowledged. Thus, by recognizing communication as an ongoing process of meaning-creation while simultaneously responding to the changing and more challenging environment of organizations, the strategic management of communication is considered a legitimate response (Cornelissen, 2011; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b). Hence, current research explores perspectives on strategy and communication from the point of *emergence* throughout organizational settings, and as such they are not only a product of management initiatives (Hallahan et al., 2007; King, 2009; Marchiori & Bulgacov, 2012; Mintzberg, 1990). Research has also shown strategic communication processes as a co-creation between organizations and stakeholders (Johansen & Andersen, 2012).

Arguments for strategic communication and communication management resonate with the identification of the increasingly complex and competitive organizational environment, where, for example, fragmented and demanding audiences, the explosive growth of messages through new communication channels, and new demands on organizational effectiveness underpin integration (Cornelissen, 2011). The appearance of consistency (being perceived as *one* organization) is strived for. Striving to be unique incorporates understandings of the value of a clear and strong identity and of the public perception - the reputation of an organization. Identity reflects a notion of what an organization *is and stands for*, incorporating both self-representing aspects of an organization and how organizational members understand and interpret *who they are* (Hatch & Schultz, 2004; C. B. M. Van Riel, 1995). Likewise, external images and the reputation of an organization are key elements of strategic communication. The perceptions by stakeholders of an organization are addressed through the integration of all communication. Consequently, attempts to influence stakeholders in a positive direction are part of strategic communication. The strategic management of communication is understandably an attractive concept to organizational leaders by offering straightforward solutions of alignment, coordination, and integration, resulting in stability and predictability (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011).

### **The Centrality of Integration**

To incorporate the activities on social media into a coherent organizational whole, the notion of integration is of fundamental importance to strategic communication (Cornelissen, 2011; Falkheimer & Heide, 2014a). With communication viewed as a central management function with the task of coordinating an organization and its messages, the integration aspect is



centralized in strategic communication. To coordinate and integrate communication, the suggested approach is one of which the responsibility to oversee and operate communication is located at the communication departments. The rationale builds on the ideas that a communication department has the (professional) ability to include both internal and external dimensions, as well as being able to coordinate various organizational units. Christensen, Firat, et al. (2008, p. 424) define integrated communication as “the notion and the practice of aligning symbols, messages, procedures and behaviors in order for an organization to communicate with clarity, consistency and continuity within and across formal organizational boundaries”. This is a notion operating to align all communication and thus aiming to address stakeholders similarly. Communication departments and communication professionals play a significant role in contemporary organizations, and the relations between communicators<sup>9</sup> and senior organizational management - and also their recognition of communication - has become more important (Frandsen & Johansen, 2015). Centralizing the responsibility of communication, as a result of integration efforts, implies that there is a “privileged perspective”, where a vigilant view provides transparent and unambiguous insights of organization and communication activities (Christensen et al., 2008). Hence, to create a central communication function with an overarching responsibility is presented as a legitimate way to organize communication (Tench et al., 2009).

### **Doing Strategic Communication**

Nothhaft (2010) *shadowed* communication managers in German companies to study how they did when managing communication. He identified and distinguished between *first-order* management and *second-order* management. By managing communication and communicators via planning, organizing, and controlling, a first-order management is recognized. Second-order management is instead about how concepts and concerns of communication were institutionalized to exercise influence in the organization. With the often-present top-down approach, managers' control is transformed into action through careful planning of communication and its associated activities. Plans are made to guide communication work and provide stability in the uncertain environment (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). Hence, planning is a way to act pre-emptively to organizational concerns, as well as to reduce risks during uncertainty (Cornelissen, 2011). The notion supporting the idea of planning rests on an instrumental ability to achieve organizational goals (e.g., to convey messages that remain consistently understood throughout an organization, or

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<sup>9</sup> With *communicators*, I refer to and include organizational members that, in different ways and to various degrees, are related to the practices of strategic communication, ranging from senior management and middle managers to communication professionals and administrators.

the possibility to gain public trust by communicating “correctly”, and a way for management to oversee the proper execution of communication) (Mahoney, 2011). Vital to this task is the communication department and the communication practitioners who are tasked to communicate the vision produced by management, alongside with the policy and strategy documents produced to govern communication (Hallahan et al., 2007).

Grunig and Hunt (1984) presented their four models of public relations (press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical communication, and two-way symmetrical communication) to understand the activities and roles of communication practitioners (see also Tindall & Holtzhausen, 2012). However, the organizing of the roles of communication practitioners in strategic communication largely retains a managerial perspective. The managerial perspective, and hence managers on different levels, have been a point of departure for studies on strategic communication in the making. Nevertheless, a micro approach to study strategic communication in the making and as emergent has been investigated (e.g., from the *strategy as practice* school) (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2015; Svensson, 2016). Here, the study examined what people do when working strategically. However, limited empirical research has been conducted.

The role of communicators across an organization is centered on the content of the centrally produced visions, communication policies, strategies, and guidelines, and how they are implemented. Less attention has generally been given to how the documents are received, understood, and used in everyday work. The responsibilities are connected to control of communication, described and assigned in accordance to overarching planning and official documents.

## Social Media and Strategic Communication

The introductory chapter presented the role of social media as being especially suited to use as a springboard to study strategic communication insofar as these new digital communication channels represent ideas of decentralization, a participatory culture, and inclusion, which challenge established and conventional communication approaches centering on control, effectiveness, and a managerial perspective (c.f., Deetz, 1992; Jenkins, 2006; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Shirky, 2008). The development and use of new digital technologies have always attracted attention, often associated with hopes of general changes of general empowerment and participation throughout society. Similarly, social media have spread and become adopted to diverse organizations with similar connotations (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Picard, 2015). Even though they are not *new technologies per se*, social media do offer variations in the ways we communicate and present contemporary organizations with

communication channels that enable different patterns of communication (Kaplan, 2015). In the sense of emerging co-creation approaches in strategic communication, the centrality of the participatory ideal in social media appears well-suited to how organizations may approach the creation of reputation and brand (Allagui & Breslow, 2016; Hatch & Schultz, 2010). It has been noted that social media (and digital communication technologies) is one of the central challenges to communication practitioners today (Kent, 2010). Simultaneously, the use of social media is rapidly growing in different organizations and in society, presenting an intriguing context for continued exploration (c.f., Findahl & Davidsson, 2015; Moreno, Navarro, Tench, & Zerfass, 2015; D. K. Wright & Hinson, 2011; D. K. Wright & Hinson, 2013, 2014, 2015; A Zerfass, Verhoeven, Tench, Moreno, & Vercic, 2011).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) defined social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.” I adopt a similar understanding, which consequently requires a few words on Web 2.0. Tim O'Reilly (2005) argued that we should understand Web 2.0 based on six trends programs become platforms, the wisdom of crowds, data inside, customer integration/user-based content, being ubiquitous and dynamic, and browser-independent content. The significance of Web 2.0 is that it includes a mass perspective on potential participation and the constantly changing nature according to its users' activities and contributions. Social media are an archetypical feature of this development as it is dependent on its users and their production of content. However, understanding of social media types is multifaceted and often confusing when browsing the pertinent literature. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) presented six types of social media in their influential paper: collaborative projects (e.g., wiki), blogs, content communities (e.g., YouTube, Flickr), social network sites (e.g., Facebook), Virtual game worlds, and Virtual social worlds. However, more related and applicable in a strategic communication context is the work of Bartlett and Bartlett (2012), who in their overview (from a perspective on social media's legitimacy in communication) defined four categories of social media types: social networking (e.g., Facebook), knowledge collaboration (e.g., a wiki), content sharing (e.g., YouTube, Flickr), and blogging (e.g., blogs, Twitter).

These broad categories function as guiding concepts to approach social media in this study. Social media are hence considered as sites with the possibility for networking and interactions, and places for production and sharing of various content (e.g., photography, video, and audio), or engaging in exchange of information, views, and opinions. However, all social media can be assumed to contain traits of the various types presented above: no platform is without interaction or the possibility of sharing insights, ideas, and information, and what is really the difference between sharing content

and collaborate in “knowledge” projects? This brings me to reflect on the possibility that “social” in social media might be misrepresented. Drawing on techno-determinism, one can ask whether media and channels, which are not classified as social media, are *un-social* (Papacharissi, 2015)? Hardly. This, however, was not a topic for this dissertation, but an inspiration to remain open to interpretations of social media throughout the research project. Although social media are broadly acknowledged as generators of social change, giving organizations a *human voice* (Weinberger, Locke, Levine, & McKee, 2009) and putting the user (stakeholders) in a stronger position (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Blogging is an early archetype of social media that stresses informal and personal content being shared with its readers, also offering a change for the reader to comment on the content (Puschmann, 2010; Rettberg, 2013). Interactive blogs, where personal relationships may arise, have been found to foster positive attitudes towards organizations (Yang & Kang, 2009). In a recent Danish study, Agerdal-Hjerminde and Valentini (2015) found that a government agency sought to increase its visibility. However, the blogging practices were found not to foster dialogue and engagement and its impact and value overestimated.

So, has social media brought about a change in the relations between organizations and stakeholders? A tentative answer would have to be ‘no’, it has not (c.f., Kent, 2008; Kent, 2013). However, the possibilities for taking initiatives have changed and stakeholders have a broader and easier access to technologies with a potentially greater reach and impact than earlier in history (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2012; Carpenter & Lertpratchya, 2016). Individuals now have access to channels to spread ideas, to react, and it is possible to rapidly gather a diverse group of people to join a specific cause. This condition, however, is also true for organizations. This new relationship, together with the managerial perspective in strategic communication, does not provide anything new, especially as the control of communication by organizations and communicators is fundamentally questioned, and rejected (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b; Macnamara, 2010). From a strategic communication perspective, social media can be assumed to be approached and situated as integrated and managed from a central location, overseen and operated by professional communicators to assume a role as channels for organizations to use according to organizational goals and needs. However, as the idea of control is generally acknowledged as problematic in communication, and because much social media is found to be experimental (and not “strategic”), the concept of *governance* has been suggested as a managerial framework for social media, including training of communicators, the development of guidelines, and the use of tools to monitor and measure activities (Linke & Zerfass, 2013; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Ansgar Zerfass, Fink, & Linke, 2011).

Social media's roles in the strategic communication process is not extensively researched, in particular not in how they are adopted and used within organizations. To date, research shows that the intentional use of social media still rests on operational- and efficiency-seeking approaches, reflecting a managerial approach to strategic communication (c.f., Allagui & Breslow, 2016; Distaso & McCorkindale, 2013; Duhé, 2014; Kim & Johnson, 2012; Linke & Oliveira, 2015; Linke & Zerfass, 2013; Robson, 2013; Verčič, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2015; D. K. Wright & Hinson, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015). Moreno et al. (2015) claim that most research has focused on issues of social media's content and activities, but less from an organizational and strategic perspective. However, in their research they found evidence of a "social media bubble" in which communicator perceptions seem to show an over-estimation of their own knowledge and skills (see also Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). Qualitative research, from a micro level, is scarce. Some studies have investigated contextual conditions: for example, Briones, Kuch, Liu, and Jin (2011) who studied the American Red Cross and their social media use in relationship building, Fitch (2009) studied social media use in a Singaporean PR consultancy, and Smith (2015) used grounded theory to study social media management.

## An Alternative Approach: Neo-Institutional Theory

Working with communication in organizations is complicated and, as already noted, outcomes are difficult to control. However, contributing and addressing the issues identified above, there are several branches of development of strategic communication, combining and drawing on insights from various disciplines and a host of social theories (for example Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011; Falkheimer & Heide, 2014b; Holtzhausen, 2002; Ihlen et al., 2009). These works acknowledge the issues of managerial and transmission perspectives on communication and organizations. However, what has not been thoroughly addressed and acknowledged in these works is the social embeddedness of strategic communication in relation to its local articulation. Hence, in this work I adopt the ideas formulated in the school of *organizational neo-institutional theory* (Greenwood et al., 2008; John W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014) to study strategic communication. Instead of driving research on strategic communication towards the elaboration of concepts such as efficiency and "best practices" and the approach to communication as a tool, the institutional perspective understands strategic communication through the study of organizational environments' influence and the interaction with interpretations inside organizations. Sandhu (2009, pp. 75-76) suggests adopting a neo-institutional analysis of strategic communication to create an understanding beyond viewing communication as instrumental

and a strategic function as it acknowledges: 1) the organizational embeddedness in and influence of social environments; 2) an understanding of the carriers of institutional elements; and 3) how organizations face and cope with *similar* sets of social expectations. Strategic communication is here understood as enabled and constrained by socially constructed rules, norms, and ideas, rerouting our focus to the social expectations. It would therefore be limiting to only study local efficiency-driven measures from managerial perspectives to illuminate strategic communication – because research benefits from seeking an understanding of how the social environment and conditions influence communication in organizations (Wehmeier, 2006). The managerial approach in strategic communication, including the idea of centralization of communication with delegated roles and responsibilities, the planning and execution of communication activities, and the notion of control, are, from the neo-institutional perspective, closely related to socially constructed expectations rather than being solutions proposed by managers or a “best practice”. The effectiveness of strategic communication, as central to a conventional perspective, can therefore be seen as a “rationalized myth”, providing social legitimacy for organizations by following assumptions and expectations of the environment rather than (primarily) answering to organizational needs or problems (Pallas & Fredriksson, 2011; Wehmeier, 2006).

During the past decade, neo-institutional theory has gained considerable attention in strategic communication research with several conceptual works together with a growing body of empirical studies, often with a “Scandinavian” touch. Most of these studies have been qualitative field studies (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2009, 2013; Fredriksson, Olsson, & Pallas, 2013; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2015; Kjeldsen, 2013; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010; Tench et al., 2009; Wakefield, 2008; Wæraas & Sataøen, 2013). However, except for the Scandinavian research stream, neo-institutional research in strategic communication has aligned to the Anglo-Saxon perspective, approaching strategic communication from a macro perspective. This research is often based on larger survey studies (c.f., Invernizzi & Romenti, 2009; Swerling & Sen, 2009; Tench et al., 2009; Ansgar Zerfass, 2009; Ansgar Zerfass, Schwalbach, Bentele, & Sherzada, 2014). These studies have focused on institutionalization processes of strategic communication from a top-down perspective, using a diffusion metaphor to best describe their notion of institutionalization (more on this in the following chapter, where the *diffusion* concept is rejected in favor of *translation*). Fredriksson, Pallas, and Wehmeier (2013) suggested three neo-institutional approaches to study public relations (here interpreted in the wider frame of strategic communication): *institutional logics*, *translations*, and *institutional work*. To understand strategic communication and its meanings in its social context, a description of the *translation perspective* is presented, which is fundamental to the development of Scandinavian

institutionalism. This approach allows the study of how strategic communication, as an institutionalized practice, travels between organizations and becomes meaningful in new organizational settings (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). The translation perspective of neo-institutional theory encourages the researcher to adopt an approach that includes both a broader and a narrower perspective to study strategic communication. It departs from the dominant management perspective, which has produced insightful knowledge and results, but tends to focus on a limited part of strategic communication. A translation approach, on the other hand, includes both the external environment's expectations and demands and the internal organizational conditions and processes. Neo-institutional theory thus offers a link between macro and micro levels of strategic communication when studying organizations (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Sandhu, 2009).

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented a view of a conventional perspective on strategic communication, and then described issues and problems associated with such a perspective. The underpinning purpose is to present an understanding of strategic communication that is applicable and used as a guiding framework to understand the institutional norms and ideas of communication. Through translations, these institutional properties and assumptions through influence and govern organizations' work with communication. These properties are important to describe in that they work as guiding concepts for the empirical studies while not creating a strict structure for the ensuing study. The identification of the notions of strategic planning, centralization, and control of communication are challenged from the neo-institutional outlook. They are understood as shared assumptions of communication, rather than outcomes of local decision-making processes. The translation perspective allows an understanding of how the shared assumptions become differently interpreted and put into action, resulting in a variety of expressions. We thus have inconsistency rather than consistency and contradiction rather than coherence in the outcome of discussions and activities of strategic communication. To address the issues associated with centralization, planning, control, integration, and the idea of *one voice*, Chapter 3 presents a theoretical outline and approach that gives an account of the presence of the institutionalized pressures and the translations by individual actors to make an empirical and theoretical contribution to the development of the field.

Finally, it is appropriate to point out the constructivist foundation and ethnographical inspiration of this work, which implies the recognition and relevance of the empirical accounts and concepts. With the adoption of

social media in universities as the case for this study, the theoretically *foreshadowed problems* and the emerging empirical accounts work concurrently to answer the main research problem of this dissertation (Delamont, 2004).



### 3. Neo-Institutional Theory and the Translation Approach

BY APPROACHING ORGANIZATIONS and organizational activities from an institutional perspective, it becomes possible to focus on how socially constructed conventions assert influence and govern structures and behavior. Our world is a social one, where human behavior is shaped by historical developments and current conditions to inform and guide daily life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), be it as private individuals or organizational members. Thus, how things are done are institutionalized and established as stable social orders. These social orders are not static but changeable through experiences, interpretations, and possibilities of the people inhabiting social contexts. I approach organizations (which includes the actors, ideas, and activities inside) and strategic communication informed by neo-institutional theory, which refers to the centrality of the social embeddedness of organizations and their practices via the relation and dependence on institutionalized rules, norms, and cognitive frames for behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991b; Greenwood et al., 2008). The two research questions permit me to design a study to understand the role of social media and thus apprehend how strategic communication is influenced by institutionalized norms and ideas, as well as how it is operationalized and made meaningful in organizations.

Neo-institutional theory has often retained a perspective on institutions at the macro level based on the assumption of a general application and understanding of the institutionalized ideas and practices, leaning closely to a functional outlook on institutions. From “Scandinavian institutionalism”, research has focused instead on a micro level of interpretations, ambitions, experiences, and values in its theoretical and empirical approaches (c.f., Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). However, Bitektine and Haack (2015) and Suddaby (2010) point to the benefits of a multilevel understanding, although these authors lean towards exploring the micro foundations of institutions. This study recognizes the call by presenting an understanding of neo-institutional theory in which the *translation perspective* is fundamental in approaching strategic communication. Such an approach is consistent with an emerging stream of communication research (Fredriksson, Pallas, et al., 2013; Sandhu, 2009; see also Ansgar Zerfass, 2009). First, a brief overview of the development and central pillars of neo-institutional is warranted. Second, I

elaborate on the translation perspective and its application. In the chapter, two *assumptions*, based on the institutional understanding and approach to strategic communication, are presented. These two assumptions were constructed in accordance with the two research questions. Finally, the chapter highlights the theoretical framework, research questions, and the approach to the operationalization of the study.

## Central Pillars of Neo-Institutional Theory

Neo-institutional theory is a broadly acknowledged approach to understand organizations as influenced by and a product of their social environment. Neo-institutional theory, as we know it now, started with the seminal works of John Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977), Lynne Zucker (1977), and Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983). The main ideas presented in these articles were on the relationship between organizations, the surrounding environment, and the social context wherein they operate. Their main point was on how organizations are influenced by their contexts, rather than on how organizations react strategically and with intent to external pressures (*old institutionalism*). The development thus included a move from the individual organization and its actions as a response to external stimuli and activities to inter- and intra-organizational relations and dependencies. The emerging understanding was described by March and Olsen (1984) as organizations adhering to a *logic of appropriateness*, i.e. reflecting legitimized patterns of behavior, and not a *logic of consequentiality*, i.e. to actively apply what is considered the most effective behavior (see also March & Olsen, 2005; March & Olsen, 2008). According to this view point, Organizations and organizational practices are perceived as influenced and defined by socially constructed comprehensions of appropriate behavior, and by rational and purposeful planning. Meyer and Rowan (1977) proposed the notion of *rationalized myths* to describe how organizations adopt structures and practices to gain and maintain social legitimacy (see also Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Suchman, 1995). Strategic communication in this work is approached as an outcome of organizational legitimacy processes, rather than for its impact on efficiency and a path to fulfill organizational goals (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2013; Fredriksson, Pallas, et al., 2013). However, a problem remains because the legitimized ideas and activities may fit one organization or organizational unit well, but less well for another and, as a consequence, become variously and *ceremonially* adopted (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The implication is that structures and activities are decoupled for the possibility of continued organizational activities, which otherwise would be constrained by unsuitable procedures. Following these initial insights, strategic communication is considered an institutionalized practice that influences organizations to approach and handle an increasingly

challenging environment and to engage in various problems formulated as communication issues. Thus, strategic communication consists of legitimized ideas and activities for organizations to adopt, regardless of its efficiency or application to certain organizational contexts. By doing so, they appear as trustworthy and reliable actors, reducing uncertainty in uncertain environments. When organizations work with communication, the central elements of strategic communication, identified in the previous chapter, are the centralization and managerial control of communication, the integration of organizational activities and messages to produce a coherent and consistent image of the organizations, and the planning of communication to aid organizational goals and manage its work with branding and reputation. In the current study, these are considered necessary to understand strategic communication. However, from the neo-institutional view, these are difficult characteristics to avoid and my understanding is that they are primarily resulting from the environmental embeddedness rather than being strategically chosen and used by the members of the organizations.

A basic question occupying the neo-institutionalists has been to understand why organizations of different sizes and scopes and with different goals look similar in their structure. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) accepted this homogeneity as a process of *isomorphism*, where organizations in *organizational fields* assume similarities through their close interactions and dependencies in this common field or area of practice. An organizational field is a flexible and broad concept, including a broader scope of organizational actors related in diverse ways (e.g., industries, unions, and governmental agencies). Isomorphism is a relevant concept in this dissertation. Of central interest in this study, then, is strategic communication as an institutionalized idea and practice to impact organizations in different fields similarly. Hence, the insights from the neo-institutionalists propose a view that, in the context of strategic communication, confronts the conventional understanding of *integration* and *control*. This view is one that I share and apply in the present work.

## The Concept of Institution

Central to inquiry is the concept of *institution*, although there is not one strict definition despite the field's popularity (Czarniawska, 2008a). We can, nonetheless, crystalize some shared characteristics between definitions of what *institutions* represent, including the durability and stability of social structures over time; the influence on, and governance of, organizational behavior; the role of legitimacy; and the role of the people that inhabit them (as unassuming or intentional actors) (c.f., DiMaggio & Powell, 1991a; Jepperson, 1991; Zucker, 1977). In this work, I relate to the definition of institution as presented by Scott (2014), but also acknowledge the difference in focus on institutions as encountered in the translations perspective, where

both stability and change are emphasized (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Scott (2014) understands an institution to

comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life [...] institutions are multifaceted, durable social structures made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources. Institutions exhibit distinctive properties: they are relatively resistant to change (pp. 56-57).

Institutions, in Scott's view, are resilient constructions socially created, shared, and developed over time; they are not dependent on individual actors for their survival. This position highlights the underlying social constructivist ontology of neo-institutional theory (c.f., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991a), where organizational reality is a result of the environment wherein it operates. Scott defines three *pillars* of institutions as the key to understanding organizations: their structures and activities and the different levels that institutions relate to issues of legitimacy (Scott, 2014):

- *regulative pillar*: based on laws and rules that to various degrees coercively force organizational behavior
- *normative pillar*: based on shared professional norms and values of appropriate behavior
- *cultural-cognitive pillar*: based on common and shared beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions of what are conventional.

Scott's institutional pillars represent the essence of the isomorphic mechanisms as presented by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), where *coercive* (relating to the regulative pillar), *normative* (the normative pillar), and *mimetic* (the cultural-cognitive pillar) isomorphic processes constitute the pressures and act as homogenizing agents to organizations in an organizational field. Scott (2014), however, means that there are levels of institutionalization and that the pillars effect organizations to various degrees, with the regulative pillar being the most tangible and the cultural-cognitive pillar the highest level of institutionalization, where ideas and practices are basically taken-for-granted, often without reflection by the actors.

The *regulative pillar* consists of varying degrees of coercive forces to which organizations adapt to obtain legitimacy. These consist of rules that society and governing bodies have created as sensible and appropriate expressions of how organizations should be constructed or behave. The underlying idea is the attempt to create stable and predictable environments. For example, government agencies in Sweden should act in accordance with

the Law of Freedom of Expression and managers should not hinder or conduct investigations on whistleblowers. Listed companies are obliged to provide pertinent information to stakeholders and their environment. A variety of forms of coercive measures are present and organizations may, for example, be fined if transgressing such laws. There are also “softer” forms of regulation, such as ethical codes: not following these regulations are not as directly connected to the coercive power of authorities and law, but other forms of punishment can be applied.

The *normative pillar* rests on social pressures that are often based on professional prescriptions. Ideas, models, and methods are taught in universities, learned at work, and shared as most effective or appropriate means to conduct certain activities. If failing to conform to such ideas or practices, organizations run the risk of losing legitimacy if perceived as deviant or unreliable. The norms for communication have emerged as prescriptions for how organizations are to best work with communication. For example, the idea of integration and the principle of *one* organization are crucial in strategic communication. To not present this as central to an organization’s communication may pose a serious challenge to its legitimacy, especially since view is often suggested and proposed by consultants and taught at universities (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002).

The *cultural-cognitive pillar* represents shared understandings that are often implicit, contrasting with the rules and norms that generally assume more explicit expressions. Ideas and practices become important to the extent that other behavior is unthinkable. Hence, the cultural-cognitive pillar relates to meaning-making processes of organizational actors and are not readily available to the researcher because they are internalized and thus not directly visible in practice. This institutional pillar represents the most profound form of institutionalization as it is the established way to organize and perform activity. The instrumental view of communication is one such example. Consequently, communication is often applied as a tool for organizations to transmit information, as well as to position external and internal stakeholders as *receivers*.

This widespread (Anglo-Saxon) neo-institutional view of institutions assumes a stable macro phenomenon (informing organizations top-down). Returning to Bitektine and Haack (2015, p. 60), the focus on a “macrolevel consensus around the institutionalized judgment may conceal not only the diversity of privately held yet suppressed propriety judgments but also the diversity of motives for why those judgments were not publicly communicated”, which would call for a broader take on institutions. The authors highlight the limitations of a macro perspective, helping us readdress the value of micro studies of institutions. In recent developments, the issues of homogeneity and change have been addressed (cf. Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002). Grasping how rules and norms come into being and manifest themselves in organizational fields and in organizations can thus be

approached as a multilevel undertaking, but one that favors micro-level meanings. To conclude, this primary insight into neo-institutional theory helps creating a theoretically based assumption to guide the dissertation.

**Assumption 1:** Organizations work similarly with communication as a result of strategic communication being an institutionalized idea and practice. Strategic communication offers legitimate activities and ideas, making the prescribed recipe difficult to circumvent, thus, simultaneously problematizing the view of rational and independent decision making, and the intentional communication work in organizations.

## Broadening the Approach

As shown above, neo-institutionalists have preferred a macro perspective to study organizational conditions, implying that ideas and practices are largely forcefully being processed onto organizations (Greenwood et al., 2008). This carries a deterministic view of institutions, i.e. that organizations and the individuals in the organizations accept ideas and models *hook, line, and sinker*. This perspective can be conceived of in relation to the transmission view in communication studies (Craig, 1999; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Recently, Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, and Vaara (2015) addressed the issue by examining *communicative institutionalism*, a suggestion for a development of institutional theory by the adoption of recent insights from communication studies, where an understanding of communication as a co-creative process brings some clarity to how institutions operate (see also Lammers, 2011; Suddaby, 2011).

However, institutionalized ideas and practices were initially thought of as *transmitted* to (and between) organizations, impacting them the same way and without being significantly affected by the organizations and their context. With the constructivist foundations of neo-institutional theory receiving increased attention, so did the meaning making and interpretive processes within organizations become recognized with a focus on organizational change and particularly how institutions are received, maintained, altered, or rejected (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). By addressing the *micro foundations* of institutions, the neo-institutionalists turned to the people inhabiting the organizations and enacting the institutional processes (Zucker, 1987). Institutional micro processes have received less attention in previous empirical and theoretical works, however gaining increased attention (c.f., Ansari, Fiss, & Zajac, 2010; Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006; Zilber, 2002; Zilber, 2008). Thus, the discussions and research have changed direction, where the view of institutions as mechanically diffused is largely rejected. Instead, research promotes an understanding of the institutional conditions as ongoing social and organizational processes and meaning making (c.f., DiMaggio & Powell,

1991b; John W Meyer, 1996; Oliver, 1991; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Suddaby, 2010; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). If institutions were to be diffused, the focus on macro-level processes would assume practices to be accepted *as they are* by organizations and individuals without being interrupted and without further interpretations or contextually dependent negotiations and understandings. Such a viewpoint also assumes that institutions are static, only being interrupted by major events that challenge and alter their very foundation. Returning to Scott's (2014) institutional definition, institutions are seen as stable constructions, although they are not fixed but in a continuous process in which changes and adaptations are naturally occurring components of its ongoing construction. This generates meanings that differ from context to context and between organizational members. A favorable approach to reveal organizational processes is research conducted *in situ*, which requires a qualitative research approach (Barley & Kunda, 2001). In the Scandinavian tradition of neo-institutional theory, in which the concept of *translation* operates, a micro level is recommended to make sense of organizational realities and institutional impact (c.f., Boxenbaum & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009; Czarniawska, 2008a; Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Instead of seeing institutions as stable and homogeneous entities, a translation approach acknowledges stability, but includes change and *heterogeneity* as components to produce varied meanings and activities in organizations.

The role of individual actors has been described since the 1990s, delineating how individuals possess an ability to intentionally change and affect organizational structures and practices. Such a view is opposed to the idea of actors being “institutional dopes” (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008; see also DiMaggio, 1988; Oliver, 1991). A development between these two, in which actors are not seen as institutional manipulators, is one that envisions actors as being informed by institutions, but where heterogeneity is still an outcome because of the impact and significance of local conditions and the actors' intentions and backgrounds. Thus, the institutional pressures face a multitude of contexts and interpretations that affect norms, ideas, and activities (e.g. Zilber, 2002, 2006; Zilber, 2008). To look further into this communication research and develop an institutional micro perspective, the next section introduces Scandinavian institutionalism and translation.

## The Translation Perspective

By adopting a translation perspective of institutions, there is a recognition that organizational ideas and practices result from institutional “recipes” in relation to the contexts wherein they are adopted and the individuals inhabiting them. Strategic communication may then be regarded as a macro-level construction, but also an outcome of tangled and convoluted local

conditions. Acknowledging the relation between macro and micro levels is crucial to understanding how the meanings of strategic communication are generated in the local contexts within which it is embedded. The view of institutions as stable, and hence organizations as homogeneous, changes in favor of a view of institutions as both a precondition and an outcome of ongoing individual and organizational processes, rendering institutions both stable and in constant change. This complexity produces heterogeneous organizational environments and practices, whereby translations differ between and within organizations (Scott, 2008a; K. Weber & Glynn, 2006). The translation perspective borrows from the sociology of science and actor-network theory (c.f., Callon, 1986; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Latour, 1986, 2005). Furthermore, it adopts the translation metaphor based on the proposition that ideas and practices pass between organizations and where local negotiations, experiences, and motivations shape and give institutions their local form. The diffusion metaphor implies a deterministic perspective: the translation idea understands institutions by aiming the research interest at the meaning creation. As such, it guides the empirical and theoretical work towards the interpretations and negotiations of organizational actors (c.f., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006; Zilber, 2008). For example, Boxenbaum (2006) studied how foreign management practices were transferred to a Danish context. She identified three levels of institutional processes that influenced translations: individual preferences, strategic framing, and local conditions. Zilber's (2002) interpretive study zeroed in on the relationship between actor and action and institutional meanings (see also Zilber, 2006, 2008). The results showed an interplay between meanings and actions to maintain and affect institutions, where also their dynamic and ongoing nature were acknowledged. Strategic communication as translation, then, draws on stable institutional elements that assume local forms based on the conditions of organizations and actors in contact with the practices and ideas in question. The adoption and use of social media may thus be assumed to be visibly influenced by the recipe of strategic communication, but that outcomes will differ between and within organizations.

Plans rarely materialize precisely as intended. However, as Sahlin-Andersson (1996, p. 85) put it, "although there are no 'rules to follow', each edited story seems to reveal the 'rules which have been followed'". This refers to a suggested set of somewhat implicit *editing rules* (*context, formulation, and logic*) that restrict translation processes (c.f., Hedmo, Sahlin-Andersson, & Wedlin, 2005; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). When ideas are fitted to a new set of local conditions - and hence expectations - they are disembedded from their original features and time-space conditions. Some conditions of the idea are suitable to the problems and context of the new locality, whereas others are downplayed or omitted. The issue of context and



recontextualization is the *first rule of editing*, in which conditions of the original and new environments are seldom fully matching. For example, how a communication campaign is planned and performed is based on more than just copying successful procedures and content that worked for other organizations (the contextual conditions always differ), even though drawing on similar macro elements - in this case those of strategic communication. Furthermore, features of the original idea matching local conditions are highlighted, whereas unwanted or problematic features are downplayed or discarded. Thus, when implementing or managing an idea in a new context, its formulation is the *second editing rule*. The symbolical materializations (images, written texts, descriptive labels, etc.) are produced to fit well with the local context. An idea needs to present extraordinary or original features to meet the local needs and demands of the organization; at the same time, it needs to refer to stable and already legitimate perceptions in the environment. The *third editing rule*, logic, suggests that the idea should be accompanying the local demands and the wider accepted perceptions of that idea. Hence, the presentation of an idea differs from setting to setting, which leads to variations in adaptation by organizations. The editing rules inspire the current research by directing attention to the local (and if applicable, previous) conditions (its context) to how strategic communication is presented and interpreted (its formulation) and how context and formulation intermingles with shared and local understandings (its logic).

The reorientation to an emphasis on translation also includes a different perspective on how institutions spread. Ideas and practices are not shared “as they are” in time and space, but as abstractions and materialized in texts, images, or models by the adopting organizations and organizational members (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Hence, when uprooted from one place and travelling to another, ideas and practices are disembedded, repackaged into “recipes” and materialized in local recontextualizations (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005). The active interpretation processes within organizations serves both homogeneous and heterogeneous organizational realities (c.f., Pipan & Czarniawska, 2010). Given the complex institutional context of organizations, inconsistencies are expected in the practices, particularly in the management of communication (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017). However, the ideas that travel from a field or an organization are transported by *institutional carriers* Scott (2003) and with the help of these carriers re-contextualized in new settings (c.f., Ansari et al., 2010; Frenkel, 2005; Furusten, 2013; Powell, Gammal, & Simard, 2005; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002; Zilber, 2002, 2006). To summarize, to understand institutions and institutional processes, both stability and change are needed to be acknowledged, which would include how organizational activities and structures are related to different levels (societal, extra-organizational, intra-organizational) and how these unfold inside organizations (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

## Institutional Carriers

Sevón (1996, p. 51) refers to imitation as an organization translating ideas and practices “into something that fits into its own context and materializes it into action. The results of this action may or may not be similar to the idea that was originally conceptualized by the imitating organization”. Ideas and practices are carried through chains of translators in a process called *imitation* (contrary to that of copying). As contexts, experiences of actors, and intentions vary, the enactment of ideas take on different forms.

Because meaning-making is both an individual and joint social achievement, there is a challenge in conceptualizing translation processes. Actors respond variously to institutional recipes that enter organizations: thus, strategic communication is a macro phenomenon that meets the micro levels in interactions consisting of the present norms, rules, practices, organizational contexts, and their own experiences, ambitions, and intentions. To address this issue, I investigate how actors make sense of the institutional elements in their given contexts, drawing on the notion of *institutional carriers* to identify elements and particularities of strategic communication (Scott, 2003, 2014). Four carries are identified by Scott as elemental to support the travel of ideas:

- *symbolical systems* (values, frames, rules carrying meaningful information. In strategic communication, e.g., the purpose of communication or the responsibility associated with position)
- *relational systems* (interpersonal and inter-organizational links and organizational structure, e.g., staffing, identities, and meetings)
- *routines* (patterned actions and working routines seen in, e.g., guidelines, co-operations, informal relations, sanctions, and monitoring)
- *artifacts* (material culture: objects signifying standards or possessing symbolical value; e.g., manuals, guidelines, reports, and websites)

Fundamental to Scott’s (2003) conceptualization is the recognition that these elements can be variously decoded by the organizational actors according to their context and ambition. The institutional elements meet the local conditions and rationales, which result in unique translations of strategic communication in different organizations (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). The normative, regulative, and cultural-cognitive elements are moved by assorted carriers meeting local conditions in which a negotiation process is initiated by different local actors. Individuals not only interact with the institutional carriers but are also integrated into the processes, sometimes acting as carriers themselves (e.g., when holding certain positions). Thus, for this study, it is necessary to study and analyze how, where, and by whom social media are translated into the organizational context by highlighting the institutional carriers. Scott’s (2003, 2014) carriers are thus present to guide

attention of the research process and to approach the institutional elements of strategic communication. Building on a social constructivist approach, it is instrumental that the researcher is open when interpreting the phenomenon at hand. Focusing on social processes provides the tool to understand how strategic communication takes place and becomes (re-)produced in different organizations. This perspective is further developed in the coming methodological chapter.

**Assumption 2:** Individuals and groups within organizations translate strategic communication differently while drawing on institutional elements in relation to the local conditions consisting of, for example, relations, experiences, ambitions, and available resources.

## Chapter Summary

The translation approach of neo-institutional theory is applied to study how strategic communication results from environment and expectations, as well as local organizational conditions and interpretations by individuals. The managerial perspective of strategic communication is explored by moving away from local decision making to study the influence of the social embeddedness of organizations' communication, and how the ideas and practices of the strategic communication recipe are given meaning and put into practice by the communicators working with social media in universities. This presents a perspective that acknowledges contradictions and inconsistencies to be present in diverse organizations, which directly challenges the notions of control and top-down approaches to communication. From the neo-institutional perspective, strategic communication is a practice that has taken an abstract shape so it can travel between organizations, where the local organizational procedures, history, structure, and experiences and intentions of individual organizational members interact to create a heterogeneous re-embedding of strategic communication (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

The guiding research questions were presented in the introductory chapter, although they are best understood in relation to the content of the two theoretical chapters. The two *assumptions* presented in this chapter act as a foundation for the formulation of the research questions: Assumption 1 guides the research via RQ1 (studying how the role of social media reflects characteristics of strategic communication in universities); Assumption 2 informs RQ2 (studying the translations of strategic communication in universities). The theoretically based research questions are created to help answer the overall research purpose, which is to address how strategic communication is an institutionalized recipe for communication, shared among organizational actors, but that assumes varied expressions inside

organizations. To study strategic communication as translations supports an understanding of how communication in organizations is a configuration of things both similar and different. This position challenges the managerial point of view of a conventional approach to communication by acknowledging that external pressures influence talk, decision, and actions (a challenge to a managerial perspective “from above” via the institutional pressures), while the individuals’ interpretations and conditions produce differences (a challenge to a managerial perspective “from below” and the local translations). The approach contributes to the academic debate and to practice by highlighting how communicators on various organizational levels cope with pressures. The research questions are answered in the three empirical chapters (Chapters 5, 6, and 7), while the purpose of understanding the presence of inconsistencies and contradictions in strategic communication is described in Chapter 8 and outlined with a neo-institutional explanation in Chapter 9.

An empirically based translation study of strategic communication is a contribution to a development of a field in which more qualitative studies are needed. The operationalization of the research questions and the purpose are discussed in the following chapter. Based on the acknowledgment of the relation of macro-micro processes and the constructivist outlook, the study employs a qualitative study design.

## 4. Methodology and Research Design

...WE SUGGEST AN approach where the organizational theorist does not don a stance of categorical superiority but rather a kind of sideways perspective (which would be very impractical for practitioners of organizing). This involves in the first place listening closely to, and later talking back to, organizational actors. Not because *they* know better, but because they know. [...] Their duty is to act, ours is to reflect and interpret, and although it would be silly to attempt to draw a strict line between the two, as everybody acts and (almost) everybody reflects. (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996:15)

In this thesis, strategic communication is considered an outcome of both stable and ongoing social processes that occupy macro and micro levels. The macro level of strategic communication comprises norms, ideas, and rules of what it is and how communication is to be done and worked with - the institutional recipe. However, the recipe materialized in the interaction with and between individuals on a micro level; it is in these interactions and the ongoing work by people in different organizational contexts that strategic communication is shaped and given its meaning. As proposed by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), a “sideways perspective” is adopted to approach and listen to the organizational actors instead of using preconceived categories to address the purpose and research questions of the thesis. By listening to the communication practitioners *because they know*, I assume a “duty” of reflection and interpretation based on the talk and actions of the organizational members. Hence, the first aim is to create an understanding of the present ideas and norms and the managerial perspective of strategic communication, which in this work is related to a review of the current state of the research field in Chapter 2. As presented in the previous chapters, strategic communication is associated with ideas and norms of control and centralization, of coordination and integration, and with an attention to identity, reputation, and branding. These norms and ideas act as a recipe of and for work with communication that guides and informs organizations and communicators, but they also interact with and become contradicted and challenged in varying temporal and local organizational contexts. Thereafter, strategic communication was studied as translations, i.e. how the recipes for communication was (re-)presented, interpreted, and

negotiated in Swedish universities. Strategic communication is thus a phenomenon that is understood from both outside and inside an organization. As a result, I associate myself with a qualitative stream of research with emphasis on the social processes and meaning formation, i.e. a constructivist view on reality (c.f., Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This warrants an interpretivist epistemological approach in which social reality is studied through analyses of how meanings are constructed in the experiences, perceptions, and behaviors of actors in the studied contexts (c.f., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Putnam, 1983; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2009). The neo-institutional approach echoes this view by centralizing the meaning formation: in this case, the presence and formulation of strategic communication.

The chapter begins with a presentation of the study's methodological foundation and research design. Next, the empirical context is presented together with arguments for the choice of sector and the specific universities. Following are arguments for the use of research techniques, how the empirical material was generated, and how the analysis was performed. Finally, the challenges and problems associated with performing this work are discussed.

## Constructivism and Ethnographical Inspiration

This study had initially formulated vague and general research questions and a broadly defined research problem. However, as the project proceeded, the problems and research questions became more defined, which reflects an interpretivist approach. Although the theoretical framework guided the inquiries, staying close to the empirical setting and its concepts was always emphasized. Thus, my initial literature review, participation in seminars, and talks with colleagues helped construct *foreshadowed problems* - ideas that initially guided the research (Delamont, 2004). To contribute to an alternative understanding of strategic communication and how it becomes meaningful in organizations, I needed to get close to the actors, their perceptions, and interpretations and hence their everyday contextual situations and work with social media. I drew inspiration from ethnographical research to watch, listen, and talk to individuals in the organizational settings. Actors were studied in their organizational contexts so I could develop an understanding of the conditions, the presence of the strategic communication characteristics, and how communicators were working with social media as part of universities' intentional communication. Helpful in this respect is John Brewer's (2001) description of ethnography, in which emphasis is put on *qualitative* research and "big" ethnography (contrasted by "little" ethnography, which is described as a *method* for field research). I align to Brewer's view of ethnography as an

approach to conduct qualitative research with a preference to study social meanings in their natural settings (a big ethnography). However, Brewer (2000, p. 10) provides a definition of “little” ethnography, which he claims is not actually all that small because it builds on a wider idea than that of being a mere research technique:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.

“Big” and “little” ethnographies are hence closely related and hereafter referred to only as ethnography. The methodological approach and research pursuit are about meanings and methods are adopted in accordance with that pursuit. Van Maanen (2011b) describes the process of an ethnographical study as consisting of both fieldwork to generate data and the construction of a *compelling presentation*. These are not separate processes, but closely connected throughout a research project in an iterative process that alternates between the field, the desk, and the researcher’s mind to understand the social meanings (Czarniawska, 2014). The constructivist perspective, neo-institutional theory, the translation perspective, and ethnography come together to form a framework to study strategic communication from “inside” in an attempt to catch interpretations and meanings created *in situ*. The rationale for selecting the case for this study is further detailed below, but given the nature of the research problem and the context of universities and social media, a decision was made early to make an initial study on the role of social media and the content of Vice-Chancellor blogs. The content reflected the positioning and aim of the blogs, which gave rise to questions of its management. The answers of the blog study generated inspiration and guidance on how social media represents characteristics of strategic communication in the universities. In addition, they directed attention to questions on the role of social media in terms of its purposes, management, and activities. A focus on purposes of social media, being *one* university, and integration in order to control and organize social media emerged to guide further research.

An ethnographically inspired approach allows multiple opportunities to study strategic communication in its social context. As Brewer (2000) argued for an elaborated view on ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) presented a host of labels for this type of qualitative research, where *fieldwork*, *qualitative inquiry*, *virtual ethnography*, and *case study* are viewed as overlapping concepts. The label is hence less important than *how* research proceeds and is presented. The ways of acquiring insights from the field, the analysis and interpretation of these insights and the *compelling*

*story creation* are all needed to convey a trustworthy ethnographical account (Van Maanen, 2011b). Thus, the following empirical chapters are intentionally rich with information to provide a solid foundation for analysis, discussion, and conclusions. Furthermore, contemporary scholars of organization theory and sociology have started to challenge “traditional ethnography”. For example, Czarniawska (2008b), Van Maanen (2011b), and Agar (1996) emphasize a need for mobility and novel approaches to follow modern forms of organizations and organizing. This emphasis on novel approaches was considered crucial to study social media in the universities. Hence, with a methodology based in a constructivist world view and ethnography as a source of inspiration, the study of a complex social phenomenon is opened for diverse ways to understand how meanings about strategic communication are constructed. It allows and encourages flexibility. Early anthropologists and ethnographers sought to live as close as possible during an extended period in the culture of study. However, organizing is decreasingly synonymous with one place or one time, with a need for innovative approaches to study organizational practices. For example, Brose (2004) identified a set of issues that deals with simultaneity in contemporary society, where *acceleration* (the speeding up of social processes decreases attention to relations and products and are in constant need of renewal) results in *shortened time horizons* (expectations and commitments are increasingly precarious) that significantly impact *increasing simultaneity* (the expanded reach and interrelation of society). Staying “on site” and following everyday activities by observing behavior, conversation, and interactions can therefore produce limitations for organizational studies. To track and understand the meanings constructed in relation to the role of social media in the universities, the research design purposely did not stringently follow a set of predefined research techniques, but remained open and adapted to problems as they arose. At the same time, typical “qualitative methods”, such as observations and interviews, were favored (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Thus, a broad array of empirical materials was gathered and generated. The mainstay techniques of traditional ethnography are observations *in situ*, interviews, and the collection of various documents (Schwartzman, 1993), which were also employed in this dissertation. However, formal and informal interviews emerged as a key method of the study in close relation to observations. In addition, the analysis of documents and a content analysis were used to produce “thick descriptions” (i.e. descriptions to explain not just the behavior but its context as well) (Geertz, (1973). Studying social media in universities was often allusive, and during the initial stages of my observations, I adopted the practice of following objects (*shadowing*) (Czarniawska, 2008b; Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007). This meant that the official social media accounts of the universities assumed a fundamental role as a starting point for my inquiry, but at the same time keeping the people related to these



channels in the forefront. Originally, shadowing was a method designed to closely follow the activities of a person in a daily context to hear, see, and reflect on various situations. For example, Attila Bruni (2005) shadowed the introduction of an electronic patient record in a hospital setting. The author observed the interactions and actions between humans and non-humans (the system). Similarly, in the present study social media accounts were identified, focusing on the official accounts representing the university or official roles. Subsequently, the study followed the varied levels of meaning-making related to the accounts. When following the accounts, a flexible approach was employed so links and relations of social media throughout the universities could be followed. Thus, by focusing on the official social media accounts as the “object” and point of departure, a way of maneuvering the complex environment that modern organizing and the use of digital technologies generate was created. Social media are relatively new as communication channels, still developing and changing quickly. In addition, the relation between stakeholders and organizations on social media created uncertainties. All this this made the study of strategic communication challenging (c.f., Cornelissen, 2011; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). The flexibility of this approach makes it suitable to investigate the phenomenon of strategic communication.

## Design: Operationalizing the Study

In accordance with the research questions, the open methodological approach, and by adopting flexibility in the application of methods, the thesis was operationalized via two empirical parts (hereafter, referred to as part I and part II). *Part I* mainly corresponds with RQ1 while RQ2 corresponds with *part II* (though the research questions and the material are interrelated).

### **Empirical part I**

Social media was studied from a broader approach to the empirical field with the aim to study the presence of the strategic communication recipe at the universities. The study centered on how senior university representatives (Vice-Chancellors, Communication directors, and management communicators) describe social media in general (Chapter 5), and Vice-Chancellor blogs in particular (Chapter 6). Appendix 1 presents an overview of the interviews supporting Part I.

Chapter 5 is based on interviews with 17 representatives from 16 Swedish universities and university colleges (at one of the universities, two interviews, one with the Vice-Chancellor and one with the Communication director, were conducted because of a misunderstanding and double booking). Thus, this interview approach favored here provided a broad coverage of how strategic communication is present and discussed in the

universities' more senior management positions. The selection of universities and interviewees for Chapter 6 was based on the same selection plan as that in Chapter 5, but limited to include the universities with the presence of Vice-Chancellor blogs during the spring of 2014 (13 interviews at 12 universities).

Chapter 6 is constructed on two types of material and analysis: content analysis of the Vice-Chancellor blogs and interviews with university representatives. As noted above, the selection of universities and interviewees were based on the presence of an active VC blog during the spring of 2014. The content analysis of VC blogs was performed before the interviews (the analysis included content of all active VC blogs between 2011 and 2012) and determined whether content aligned to arguments of reputation (e.g., differentiation) or to arguments of legitimacy (e.g., similarities). The interviews represent descriptions of how and why Vice-Chancellors blogs are used in universities in relation to the strategic communication recipe. Universities, individuals, and blogs were *not anonymized* in this part of the empirical study. The contents of the blogs are available to anyone interested and the senior officials that I interviewed were informed before the interview and that the material would not be anonymized.

## **Empirical part II**

The role of social media was studied at two universities through watching, listening, and conversing with communicators on all levels during approximately six months of fieldwork (see overview in Appendix 2). The findings are summarized in Chapter 7. The fieldwork allowed a closer study of translations and the local outcome and shape of strategic communication. However, the findings in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 are also relevant in understanding the translations (RQ2), just as the fieldwork supports understanding of how the characteristics of the strategic communication recipe are present (RQ1). The two universities and the communicators were anonymized to allow for sensitive discussions that sometimes took place. Anonymization was a decision reached during the fieldwork.

Chapter 7 is most detailed in terms of breadth of the empirical material. Delving deeper into these two universities is not a matter of studying "extreme organizations", but rather a way to create a balanced representation of strategic communication. I spent approximately three months at each university, which also involved conducting follow-up interviews with the first university before starting with the second university. Observation was the initial method but because of challenges of following social media work at the universities by watching what was happening, interviews became the main method of generating material (in all, 63 formal and informal interviews were recorded). Other empirical material included documents for communication and social media that were used on different levels at the

universities. This material also included various contents on social media and the homepages of the universities.

The approaches and methods are further detailed below, but before doing so, we turn to a presentation of the rationale for selecting Swedish universities as the empirical field for the study. The term *fieldwork* is used to describe the work performed for part II and Chapter 7.

## A Rationale for Studying Communication and Social Media in Universities

The development of communication in the public sector is enjoying increased interest in current research (c.f., Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016a; Wæraas & Maor, 2014). Issues of branding, reputation, and identity are especially “hot topics” and growing resources have been invested in communication activities, not least in universities (Engwall, 2008). The approach to communication as an organizational function in universities is therefore developing and strategic communication may then be assumed to exercise a strong influence on how communication work is taking shape. This presents a pertinent case to study strategic communication in universities.

Communication is increasingly viewed as a necessary organizational function and, not surprisingly, is spreading and growing in all types of organization. However, even though organizational conditions vary, the central ideas of communication retain similar characteristics (Christensen et al., 2008; Zeffass, 2009). Higher education in Sweden and globally has always been in a state of change, but market logics and values are increasingly moving into the sector in an emerging marketization of academia. This is visible, for example, in the role of international and national university rankings or the adoption of managerial ideals and practices for organizing aspects and organizational structure (c.f., Czarniawska & Genell, 2002; Ek, Ideland, Jönsson, & Malmberg, 2013; Hazelkorn, 2011; Musselin, 2005; Pallas & Wedlin, 2013; Wedlin, 2008; S. Wright & Williams Ørberg, 2008). In Sweden, the topic is under intense debate (c.f., Ahläck Öberg et al., 2016; Engwall, 2016; Wedlin & Pallas, 2017). For example, the procedure of electing a new Vice-Chancellor at Uppsala University was proposed to undergo a change in 2016, but the initiative was met with wide disapproval, with the discussion pending between the influence drawn from new public management ideas or the more traditional collegial governance. The issue that is being pushed is one of decreased governmental regulation and, arguably, more independence for the universities. Governance of universities is essentially an amalgamation of management, collegiality, and bureaucracy, with management ideals at the

uppermost echelon (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). The universities are reworked to become “complete organizations”, an idea found in the new public management concept (c.f. Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Hood, 1991). The development can, for example, be seen in the recruitment of Vice-Chancellors, which has become more focused on management skills than on academic credentials (Engwall, 2014). An argument that is centered in the debate on university governance and the development of the higher education sector is that of *increasing competition* and the necessity of a competitive advantage in which universities are seen to operate on a market where the goal is to attract students, highly qualified administrative staff and researchers, as well as to feed a continuous need for new financial resources. As a consequence, attention has turned to how universities are to strategically work with communication to address issues of identity, reputation, and branding, and in such a way gain an advantage on the market (c.f., Drori et al., 2013; Geschwind, Melin, & Wedlin, 2016; Sataøen, 2014; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). Increasing resources has been aimed to professionalize communication as an organizational function and to enlarge the communication departments at universities (Engwall, 2008). Universities also represent a change in the public sector where, for example, a study by Fredriksson and Pallas (2013) showed that among Swedish public sector organizations, universities stood out in terms of their attention to visibility and position in the field *vis-à-vis* other universities. In the increasing attention to communication and communicative activities, social media are becoming a key instrument for universities’ branding (Bélanger, Bali, & Longden, 2014).

As a first step, the choice was made to address a broader set of universities. Thus, 16 Swedish universities<sup>10</sup> were included in an interview study on social media, Vice-Chancellor blogging, and a content analysis of VC blogs. The initial selection of universities was based on the presence of active blogs. This produced an understanding of how the characteristics of strategic communication were represented in the sector, acting both to identify the presence of institutional elements and to guide the ensuing translation study in two universities on the adoption and use of social media. Two universities were chosen for the field study, not for comparison, but as two individual organizations representing the same case. The two universities were studied on two separate occasions. The study of the first university generated insights and understandings of social media’s role in

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<sup>10</sup> When over-viewing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sweden, about 50 can be identified. However, when breaking it down, we may identify 16 universities, and 14 university colleges (most are public organizations), but also a number of independent education providers. 16 of the universities and the university colleges were included in the broader study of blogs and social media (no active blogs were encountered in the independent HEIs). <http://english.uka.se/facts-about-higher-education/higher-education-institutions-heis/list-of-higher-education-institutions-in-sweden.html> (accessed 09272017)

university communication, which were supportive when engaged with the second university in the sense that it provided research themes as well as personal reflections (e.g., it became obvious that some questions and answers would never have emerged without a lengthy period of observations in the universities - issues that would probably not have been addressed in formal interviews).

To select universities for the fieldwork, two variables were used (age and size of the universities, see Table 1). Using this strategy, one younger and smaller university and one bigger and older university were selected. This is related to the findings of the initial interviews at the 16 universities, indicating differences in communication work between older and larger universities and between the younger and smaller ones. The selected younger and smaller university is referred to as Andromeda University, while the larger and older university is named Centaurus University. Andromeda University does not have a VC blog and is thus not included in part I (Centaurus University is included in part I, but not named). A delimitation was made to categorize universities according to status of being young/old or small/large. Having university status for  $\geq 40$  years was considered “old”, whereas  $< 40$  years (or status as a university college) was categorized as “young”. Size was related to number of students, with  $< 20000$  students defined as a small university and  $> 20000$  as a large university (number of employees was considered as a category, but for simplicity, student numbers were chosen to represent a large or small university).

Table 1. Age and size of universities (see Appendix 3 for full overview)

	<b>Students &lt;20000</b>	<b>Students &gt;20000</b>
<b>&lt;40 years as a university (here all university colleges are included)</b>	Young/small: KAU, MIUN, MDH, HIB, HIS, ÖRU + Andromeda University	Young/large: LNU, MAH
<b>&gt;40 years as a university</b>	Old/small: KTH, SLU	Old/large: GU, LIU, LU, SU, UMU, UU + Centaurus University

As previously mentioned, the assumption is that the ideas and norms of communication affect the universities similarly, with local conditions always being pertinent to translations. We can expect differences in size of communication departments, the number of communicators in the two universities, and potentially different types of relation between university management, the communication department, and local communicators. Having two types of university is meant to provide more extensive and richer material.

## Timeline

Using an abductive procedure, the development of the dissertation was supported by moving between the field, theory, and the writing process, something Van Maanen (2011a) referred to as fieldwork, headwork, and textwork, respectively. Moving between these different work dimensions allowed for flexibility needed in the study of meanings. Figure 1 depicts an overview of my steps and the research trajectory.

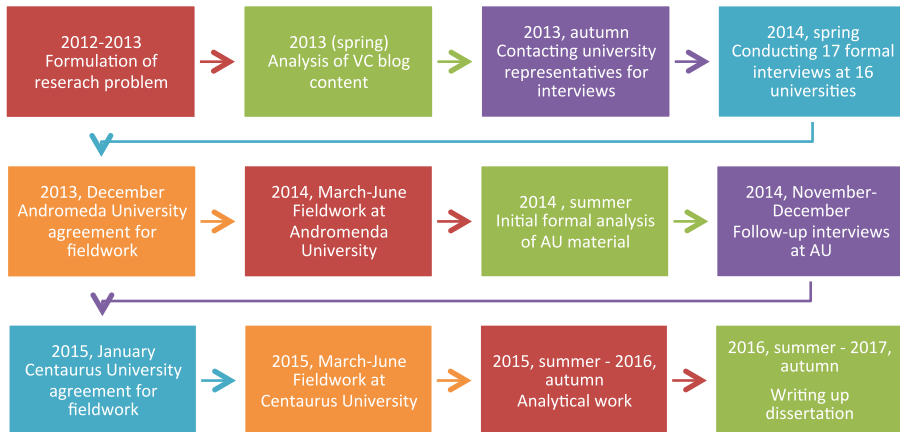


Figure 1. Timeline of the research process.

The overview represents a rather strict performance of the research. The research process, however, was, as already noted, all but strict. The different parts and stages of my research merged into each other, containing a constant return to the reconfiguration of the problem description and the research questions:

- 2012-2013: a broad research problem was designed to guide the project.
- 2013, spring: blog content from Vice-Chancellor blogs active during the period 2011-2012 was collected and analyzed. Fourteen blogs were identified as active during the whole or parts of the two-year period. In all, they produced and published 1326 blog posts.
- 2013, autumn: Representatives from universities with active VC blogs were contacted with a request to interview “a person working closely with the VC blog and with knowledge about the university’s social media and communication work”. I received positive responses to interview Vice-Chancellors, Communication directors, and management communicators at 12 universities with active VC blogs (at one of these universities both the Vice-Chancellor and the Communication director

were interviewed). Four Communication directors from universities without VC blogs were also contacted and included in the study.

- 2014, spring: 17 interviews at 16 universities were performed. All interviews were conducted between 31 January and 20 May 2014. The interviews were analyzed in the autumn of 2014.
- 2013, December: Andromeda University's Communication director was contacted and a first meeting was held in January 2014, resulting in the approval of my study and fieldwork at the university.
- 2014, March-June: Fieldwork at Andromeda University. The fieldwork consisted of observations and informal and formal interviews on a rolling schedule (first week Monday to Wednesday, second week Tuesday to Thursday, and so on), consisting of two to three days in the field per week to produce a systematic approach and coverage.
- 2014, July-September: An initial reading and analysis of the field material from Andromeda University was performed.
- 2014, November-December: Based on the initial analyses and readings of the material, six follow-up interviews were conducted at Andromeda University.
- 2015, January: The Communication director of Centaurus University was contacted, with the questions being delegated to a group manager at the communication department. After initial hesitation on their behalf to not have enough time to host me, the study was approved in early spring 2015.
- 2015, March-June: Fieldwork was conducted at Centaurus University.
- 2015, summer – 2016, summer: Analytical work was carried out.
- 2016, summer – 2017, autumn: Finalizing the dissertation.

## Generating and Gathering the Material: Using Multiple Methods

Observations, interviews, and analysis of documents are a mainstay of ethnographical techniques (Schwartzman, 1993), techniques central to this study. In addition, the study was supported by a content analysis of the VC blogs. Table 2 presents the generated or collected material of each method used in the study.

Table 2. Generated or gathered material of each method

<b>Selection</b>	<b>Research technique</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Time period</b>
<i>Vice-Chancellor blogs</i>	Content analysis	Arguments and orientation in Vice-Chancellor blog posts	1326 blog posts from 14 blogs	2011-2012
<i>Interviews with senior representatives from multiple universities</i>	Formal interviews	Senior university representatives	17 interviews at 16 universities	Spring, 2014
<i>Interviews with communicators in the two fieldwork universities</i>	Formal and informal interviews	Communicators related to social media	63 formal and informal interviews	March – June 2014 + November – December 2014 (Andromeda University); March – June 2015 (Centaurus University)
<i>Observations at the two fieldwork universities</i>	Participant –as-observer and observer-as-participant + shadowing of social media	Communicators related to social media	3 + 3 months of observations	March – June 2014 (Andromeda University) + March – June 2015 (Centaurus University)
<i>Communication documents from the two fieldwork universities</i>	Document analysis	Document related to social media	Official documents on social media, based on shadowing	Same timeline as observations

## Interviews

From a constructivist perspective, interviews can be understood as dialogue in a social encounter, i.e. a co-construction of the empirical material (Rapley,



2001). The interviewee was not approached as a container of information, but as a subject engaging in active construction of a story – a representation – of social media and strategic communication in the university. When engaging with people, I as a researcher simultaneously participated in the production of the story, which inherently results in an empirical material based on both the interviewer’s purpose and the interviewee’s re-production of ideas, intentions, and interpretations of the past, current, and future (the interview was an active social process where meaning was created and given shape) (c.f., Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rapley, 2004). It is, however, never “only” a conversation, but being the researcher, with my own research interests, I did possess some level of control and initiative (interviews are not “naturally occurring data”, but constructed) (Silverman, 2011). Hence, the interviews I conducted are not understood as unbiased containers of information, but should rather be viewed as encounters where empirical material was produced on a topic originating from the researcher’s interest in relation to the communicators’ *know how*.

It has been argued that we live in an interview society (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997), and interviews are often the preferred method in qualitative research. In this work, interviews formed a crucial part of the study of social media. Interviews were conducted in two “sets”: a first set related to the part I and a second set in the fieldwork of part II. The first set of interviews was open, semi-structured interviews, conducted with representatives from a broad selection of universities (Chapter 5 and 6). These interviews focused on representations of the role of social media and the VC blog in the universities. A second set of interviews (Chapter 7) was conducted during the fieldwork at Andromeda University and Centaurus University, and is closely related to both the first set of interviews and the ongoing fieldwork at the two universities. Hence, the broader representations from the sector not only developed the succeeding sector interviews, but also fed into the questions of the fieldwork. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the separation of methods presented here is made in an effort to elaborate on the respective conditions and techniques associated with the methods.

The two sets of interviews had a somewhat distinctive character in that the interviews from the sector had a more exploratory purpose, containing questions about *which* concepts of strategic communication that were present and *why* and social media were used. In contrast, the interviews in the fieldwork answered questions about *what*, *why*, and *how*, but also because the fieldwork came at a later stage. The sector interviews were of a formal character, where the interviews were carried out from an outsider’s perspective. This became tangible for me as the fieldwork pursued, and I realized how my emerging insights help me pose questions that would never have been brought up in a first and only meeting with an interviewee in a

formal interview (e.g., about the tensions in, and different interpretations of, the relation between the Vice-Chancellor and the communication department at Andromeda University). For the first set of interviews, a loosely structured interview guide was created that emphasized the interviewee's accounts and allowed the discussion to elaborate to remain open to the participants' meanings and concepts (Appendix 4). Paraphrasing Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2012, p. 20) – "*I follow wherever the informants lead me in the investigation of my guiding research question.*" The guide was also developed and changed based on results from previous interviews to allow flexibility. All interviews for part I were recorded and transcribed, together with taking written notes during and after the interviews to reflect on points made, things left out, or noteworthy comments.

The interviews at Andromeda and Centaurus University included organizational members from all levels, but the fieldwork was initiated at the communication departments, where I identified the communicators' responsibilities for and relations to the university's official social media accounts. The interview material grew organically from a continuous identification of active social media accounts and the people connected to these, also including indirect relations such as decision makers relevant for an account and previous studies, but also from the simultaneous observations and document analyses. At both universities, the communication department acted as a starting point, with the study branching upward to university management and outward to local accounts at departments and faculties. At Andromeda University, the goal was to identify all active social media accounts and their corresponding actors, which was deemed possible because of the university's smaller size. At Centaurus University, I acknowledged a limitation because of the larger size of the university. Thus, the communication department and a selected central administration representatives working close to the communication department, the university management, the university library, and representatives from a limited number of faculties and departments with active accounts were included. The interviews conducted at Andromeda and Centaurus University were often of a different character than the more formal interviews in the part I, largely because a relationship developed with many of the people in the two universities during the fieldwork (c.f., Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this case, I was not so much an outsider as in the sector interviews, but knowledgeable and often acquainted with the context and the people I engaged (Brewer, 2000). The interviews were both formal and informal. Some interviews were planned and took place in the interviewee's offices, often initiated by the researcher, but not exclusively. Many of the interviews were informal, i.e. discussions would take place in the corridor or during coffee breaks, where discussions were generally unplanned and contained a varied number of participants. I often refrained from recording the interviews during the initial fieldwork at Andromeda

University, as the engagement felt more natural and the interviews were more like conversations (the interview with the VC was recorded, and so were my follow-up interviews during the following autumn). The unrecorded interviews were documented by taking short notes during the interview and elaborated directly after the interview ended. At Centaurus University, the situation was reversed, and most interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The difference is likely due to the different nature of the fieldwork: at the smaller Andromeda University, it was easier to “get closer” to the communicators, whereas at the larger Centaurus University there had been a re-organizing of the communication department, several communicators were on sick leave, and it was more difficult to “get close”. Totally, 63 formal and informal interviews were conducted during the fieldwork: 35 at Andromeda University (7 audio-recorded and 28 recorded by taking notes) and 28 at Centaurus University (21 audio-recorded and 7 by taking written notes). The interviews are not “unique” in the sense that they represent 63 individuals, but, for example, the social media specialists at the communication departments were interviewed several times during the fieldwork.

## Observations

The central ethnographical method is the participation and observation of *what goes on* in a particular setting. Brewer (2000, p. 59) describes observations in the following way:

...data gathering by means of participation in the daily life of informants in their natural setting: watching, observing and talking to them in order to discover their interpretations, social meanings and activities.

As presented in the section above, interviews became a central technique to study the role of social media. However, observation at Andromeda and Centaurus University was an important method to approach the ongoing translations while simultaneously seeking to avoid imposing my own meanings or impact what was going on (Brewer, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). With a flexible approach to studying social media, the fieldwork revolved around observations that often resulted in interviews (hence, the close relationship between the two research techniques). Studying social media “in the making” via observations was challenging to the researcher because the study included multiple communicators, often working behind a computer screen in an office. This meant that the issue of access was an ongoing negotiation.

Table 3. Shadowed social media accounts

	<b>Andromeda University central/non-central accounts</b>	<b>Centaurus University<sup>11</sup> central/non-central accounts</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Facebook</i>	5/9	3/2	19
<i>Instagram</i>	1/2	2 /2	7
<i>Twitter</i>	2/2	3 /2	9
<i>LinkedIn</i>	2/0	3/1	6
<i>Blogs</i>	0/0	5/2	7
<i>Youtube<sup>12</sup></i>	1/1	1/3	6
<i>Total</i>	11/14=25	17/12=29	=54

The observations at Andromeda and Centaurus University were based on the shadowing of the social media accounts (Table 3). The approach may not be conventional, but suited my purpose, not least because of the sometimes-fleeting character of communication work of the digital era. The accounts worked as a point of departure for the study, initially identifying active accounts at the communication departments and later working my way out. Hence, “central” accounts are those officially representing the university or an official position at the central administration (e.g. the Vice-Chancellor). The “non-central” accounts are those representing a department, faculty or administrative role that is not part of the central administration. Social media accounts by researchers were not included, i.e. focus was limited to the administrative accounts. There is a compelling argument that researchers should be included because they are part of the official university representation. From the perspective of the social media accounts, the observations concerned who was working with the accounts, how decision making and responsibilities were distributed, what was done with them, and how actors in the universities reflected on the purpose of social media. Furthermore, I studied the relationships between employees working with social media on different organizational levels. My engagement could be

<sup>11</sup> Centaurus University also made use of Chinese social media (Weibo, Renren, Youku, and a blog), although these were not included because they were operated via a Chinese agent based in Shanghai.

<sup>12</sup> Youtube can be understood as both a retainer for content and as a channel for interactions and therefore was included.

described as pending between what Gold (1958) described as a participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant. I view my participation as a middle ground between passive and active (Delamont, 2004), meaning I was never directly involved in the actual execution of social media communication work, but nevertheless interacted with the communicators during the observations. Moreover, my role shifted according to where I performed the observations. At the communication departments, I was immersed in their daily work, whereas during visits to departments, I attained a more formal role (a *peripheral member*) (Adler & Adler, 1987).

The period for the fieldwork was pre-suggested, but not defined, to encompass about three months at each of the two universities. During the periods of fieldwork, I did not cover the full-time work at the universities, but spent two to three days per week on site, observing from morning to afternoon. The time schedule rotated to systematically cover the different days of the week. The fieldwork started from the communication department at both universities, which functioned as my “home” during the fieldwork. At Andromeda University, I was given my own office (all employees at the communication department worked in separate offices) and an access card to the university. At Centaurus University, I was initially given a place in the farthest end of a stretched corridor in the communication department and given a desk in an alcove. Within a few weeks, I was given a table in an office that was shared with two employees. These sites acted as a place where I worked on notes and memos, although also working as much as possible outside the office to participate wherever I could and where the social media accounts were “active”. Hence, I observed the everyday work and different meetings, both as invited and sometimes inviting myself. Meetings included regular “Monday morning meetings”, in which all employees attended, monthly meetings, market group meetings, meetings in which communication department representatives meet other functions at the university, meetings with external communication consultants, and informal meetings during coffee breaks. *The corridor* was also a significant site where people meet at the communication departments and a place where I observed informal gatherings and where people also engaged in conversations with me. Not all days produced good opportunities to observe social media, which accounts for why interviews became a fundamental part of the research.

In my interactions, especially at the communication department, I sometimes had to re-articulate and clarify my role as a researcher, rather than as an active or full member of the organization. Several times I was asked about my opinion on different activities and ideas, but when reminding them about my intended role, I was never pushed for further answers. At all times, I sought to remain a peripheral member during the fieldwork and to refrain from any active engagement that would change my role or significantly impact their work.

## Taking Notes in the Field

According to Agar (1996, p. 161), “field notes are the most overrated thing since the Edsel”. Actually, I find notes from the field useful and even necessary to analyze what happened. Others also raise fingers of warning on both the practice of *scribbling* field notes down while observing but also their usefulness to analysis (Van Maanen, 2011b). Regardless, field notes are considered a core empirical material in observation studies and my written accounts from the observations were of utmost importance in identifying patterns and in constructing an understanding of what was occurring in the universities (c.f., Barbour, 2013; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). Indeed, the notes are *representations* of observations – interpretations by the researcher and of the observed. By rereading and reflecting on the notes and by writing down my reflections, I view notes as invaluable outcomes of observations.

Note taking during observations was sometimes problematic in that the practice could interfere with the observations. However, to produce *thick descriptions*, I had to make use of the opportunities that arose during or directly after the observations, or even elaborated in the end of the day if it had been eventful (Czarniawska, 2014; Delamont, 2004). Hence, I scribbled notes during or after meetings and during informal talks depending on the situation. I used pen and a notebook while at the university and later transferred my notes into digital form on my computer. I also used a diary to write down personal reflections and thoughts in relation to the observations. These were most often recorded in a separate notebook, but sometimes the reflections appeared in my main notebook in relation to the observation. There are no agreed on approaches on how to take or make field notes, and as Walford (2009, p. 127) encountered in an interview study with prominent ethnographers, the basic task of field notes is “to record as much as possible of what is perceived to be relevant to the research project so that there is a record that can be used later in the analysis and writing process”.

## Documents from the Fieldwork

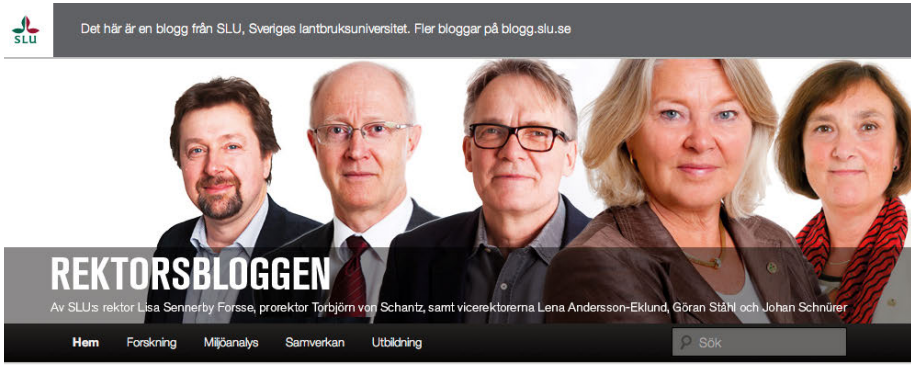
Besides conducting observations and interviews, a third type of material involved communication documents. Social media were either directly or indirectly related to the documents, and aimed at different levels of instructing their role in the university. The collected documents were produced on different organizational levels, including the university management and communication department and at faculties and departments. I received some of the centrally produced documents from the social media specialists at both universities. At Andromeda University, I also had access to the intranet where all documents were available for downloading. At Centaurus University, the same access to the intranet was not available. These documents instead were sent digitally to me after

discussing this with the communicators. Local documents deemed relevant were requested and sent after interviews at the various departments.

Those documents relevant to this study became clear during the fieldwork. I agree with Prior (2004, p. 345), who stressed that documents are “situated products”, thus their role came to make sense to me during the study. Official communication documents are intentionally produced products in certain contexts and were studied in the way they were used or how they impacted communication work. Accordingly, the documents may be considered as agents (Prior, 2004). The initially collected documents related to the universities’ communication, including vision documents, historical presentations, and web policy. Later, the collection and analysis were restricted to documents directly or indirectly linked to social media. The documents with a direct social media focus express an explicit relation: for example, “Channel strategy for Instagram”. What I did not collect was texts representing social media content, with the exceptions of the initial study of the Vice-Chancellor blogs.

## Content Analysis of Vice-Chancellor Blogs

Studying social media and communication in the higher education sector is a difficult and broad assignment. I decided that a focused initial study, and hence entry into the empirical field, would benefit the development of the project. After consultation with colleagues and a review of the strategic communication literature and development of higher education, I settled on studying Vice-Chancellor blogs (see Figure 2 for a blog example) to produce a reflection and snapshot on the communication in universities that could guide the research. Based on the general development of universities, Vice-Chancellor blogs were selected for study as indicators of how the content was oriented towards different types of social judgment in the form of aspects seeking differentiation from, or coherence with, other universities and the higher education community. The study commenced in early 2013 and the period 2011-2012 was selected for data collection. Fourteen blogs were active during the whole or parts of the period, offering 1326 blog posts to be analyzed (see Appendix 5).



**SLU behövs i bioekonomin**

Postat 2 Juni, 2014 av Rektor Lisa Sannerby Forsse

Försommaren har inletts med ett nyligen genomfört EU-val, i år med drygt 50 procents deltagande, något mer än vid föregående val. Jag tror personligen att mediernas idoga lobbande för ökat deltagande före valet haft en viss verkan. Utgången av valet var ganska nedslående i det att mörka och konservativa krafter vinner terräng i Europa.



- META
- [Logga in](#)
  - [Inlägg via RSS](#)
  - [Kommentarer via RSS](#)
  - [WordPress.org](#)

Figure 2. The Vice-Chancellor blog at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), 2014

For the content analysis, literature on organizational reputation and legitimacy were consulted. From this, three categories were developed to signify whether the content contained arguments towards differentiation and uniqueness (i.e. reputation), or coherence and similarities (i.e. legitimacy) to other universities and higher education. The identified categories were *relations*, *motivations*, and *means* (Table 4), and identified to demonstrate the occurrence of arguments for legitimacy, reputation, or both (Bitektine, 2011; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Suchman, 1995). The method was deemed appropriate to analyze and understand textual content in a specific environment, i.e. in this case, the underlying and explicit meanings in blog posts (c.f., Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; R. P. Weber, 1990).

Table 4. Operationalization and characteristics of legitimacy and reputation

Categories			
Argument	Relations	Motivations	Means
<i>Legitimacy</i>	Non-rival	Homogenizing	Symbolical
<i>Reputation</i>	Rival	Differentiating	Technical

*Relations (non-rival and/or rival)*. This category is indicative of attitudes and a base for organizational relations and competitive inclination towards



peers in the sector. It is used to distinguish between who benefits or loses and thus whether the sector or the particular university and/or individual (Vice-Chancellor) is in focus. A *legitimacy* argument generates aspects of mutual good for all included in the sector and thus there is no base for rivalry. *Reputation* emphasizes rivalry between the individual organizations and thus arguments are based on gaining benefits at the cost of other organizations.

*Motivations (homogenizing/coherence and/or differentiating)*. Motivation represents organizations' relational orientation in an explicit manner. More specifically, it represents expressions of similarities or differences. It is closely related to the previous category, but while the relations category is based on whom it relates to, this category answers what relational outcome is sought and how it is done. *Legitimacy*, in this case, homogenizes as organizations seeking a basic right to operate by imitating successful examples and initiatives into their own organization. They therefore display or present arguments of similarity and also promote comparative aspects of peers (Suchman, 1995). *Reputation* is about differentiation and organizations seeking to build or maintain reputation tend to emphasize unique abilities or features of the organization, a process that separates one university from another.

*Means (symbolical and/or technical)*. The last category corresponds to ways of presenting the desired state of being legitimate or being reputable, i.e. the means of presentation. Here, the focus is on *how* the Vice-Chancellor presents coherence or difference. *Legitimacy* is related to normative and regulatory pressures, with arguments relating to sector-wide issues being of core interest. Furthermore, the quest to obtain and retain a "right to operate" within a sector result in symbolic signaling and expressions, which would be part of an established and recognized field. For example, blog posts may include normative discussions about the purpose of a university or political rulings related to higher education. *Reputation* is related to concrete economic and organizational performances, consequences, and opportunities. This category also includes both favorable and unfavorable results and performances, if the university is in focus.

Although this thesis claims to depart from an interpretive approach, the content analysis relies on a pre-constructed framework used to develop and define coding categories, which makes the analysis structured in its approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This is not a conventional method in ethnography, but included to identify initial insights and guidance, acting supportive but not representative of the meaning formation within the universities. It should be noted that the above identification of legitimacy and reputation is categorical, separating the two concepts. However, this is *not about* the universities having or not having legitimacy or a good reputation, but how the content of the blogs is presented. Thus, from a neo-institutional

perspective, the aspects of reputation found in the blogs may be interpreted as expressions of legitimate behavior.

## Analyzing the Material

When the fieldwork at Centaurus University came to an end in June 2015, I had spent about six months at the two universities conducting observations, interviews, and gathering documents. I had travelled across Sweden to interview 17 representatives at 16 universities on the role of social media and Vice-Chancellor blogs. During this time, I had also completed a content analysis of Vice-Chancellor blogs. In June 2015, I first engaged in a more systematic analysis of the material, but throughout the fieldwork I continuously analyzed and reflected on my empirical material, generating ideas and questions for the next step. By adopting multiple research techniques, an aggregated analysis was not always straightforward and easy to assemble. In this section, I outline the analytical steps relating to the different techniques.

### Analyzing the Content of Vice-Chancellor Blogs

The first analysis that was conducted for this dissertation was based on the content of Vice-Chancellor blogs. With the initial and vaguely formulated research problem, my aim was to create insights into some of the associated questions that I raised, and therefore a broad analysis of outputs from one selected social media could function as an indicator and to describe arguments and a direction of social media output from the universities. This analysis was not regarded as a way to encounter meanings but as a support and indicator to use in the interviews and fieldwork (Falkheimer, 2014a). Based on the identified categories (*relations*, *motivations*, and *means*), I read through all blog posts published in the active VC blogs between 2011 and 2012. The coding and analysis recognized all occurrences of the features in the pre-defined categories of each blog post, producing six variables available for coding of the posts. The coding was performed in alphabetical order on one Vice-chancellor blog at a time, from the first post made sometime during 2011 (some had not yet started their blogs in the beginning of the year) to the last in December 2012. I used basic descriptive statistic and Excel to analyze and compare the material.

### Analyzing Interviews, Observations, and Documents

The interviews from the sector and the interviews, observations, and documents from the fieldwork were analyzed in an analogous way by coding the material in several independent but interrelated steps. I found inspiration

in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but also in the analytical ideas of Dennis Gioia and colleagues, and their notions of “1<sup>st</sup> order concepts”, “2<sup>nd</sup> order themes”, and “aggregate dimensions” (e.g. Corley & Gioia, 2004, 2011; Gioia et al., 2012; Gioia & Pitre, 1990). The process is basically one in which initial empirical material was gathered and tentatively analyzed, and then going back and forth between the field, the generated empirical material, theory, relevant literature, and the emerging analytical concepts. The process pays great attention to data-generated concepts, concepts encountered in the field but also the literature provided significant guidance. With concepts “found in the field” and in the literature, the research process was abductive in its form (c.f., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Czarniawska, 2014). To structure and guide the analysis, I used the concept of *institutional carriers* (Scott, 2003), which structured how I approached strategic communication from how symbolical and relational systems, routines, and artifacts in the universities in various ways conveyed the institutional recipe for communication.

The analysis of the first set of interviews and the material generated through the fieldwork was performed with the same approach but at separate times. By reading and analyzing the interview material from the sector, I first identified codes emerging from the interviewees (the 1<sup>st</sup> order concepts) (Corley & Gioia, 2004), similar to “initial coding” as presented by Charmaz (2014). These concepts were then studied and compared to find similarities and differences across the material (axial coding). At this stage, the 2<sup>nd</sup> order analysis consisted of introducing the theoretical concepts from the literature to compare and identify correspondence between field and theory, with themes emerging showing commonalities among the university representatives to be those of social media and purposes (branding, reputation, visibility, identity), the concept of being *one*, and a subsequent focus on integration of social media (and all communication) into a coherent whole. A difference was how the university colleges identified themselves as more vulnerable and in need of a stronger communication work to be competitive on a national level, whereas the established and bigger universities also recognized the competitive environment but had a more international outlook. A code that did not match with the content of strategic communication was “being an authority”. Although discussed at all universities, a clash of values was considered exaggerated. Another noteworthy finding was the codes and presence of *centralization* and *decentralization*, where strategic communication represents the former and social media the latter. However, the findings revealed a co-existence of the two. The next step was to create aggregated dimensions that consisted of the themes. Chapter 5 and 6 are constructed according to these dimensions, containing *purpose of social media*, the *view on communication*, and *working with social media*. These dimensions, or rather aggregated themes, guided the fieldwork at Andromeda and Centaurus University.

The fieldwork material was analyzed similarly to the first set of interviews. However, for the coding, I read through the material of observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents of one university at a time in chronological order. After coding the material, I studied the codes to produce joint themes. This was done because the focus is on the phenomenon and not the different universities. During all parts of the coding and analysis, I wrote memos to keep track of my thoughts, ideas, and the analytical processing that took place. The outcome of this analysis appears in Chapter 7, which, consequently, shares much of its structure with the two previous empirical chapters.

I initially started my analysis of the “sector interviews” by printing the transcriptions to be analogously analyzed. I enjoyed this approach, but because the empirical material was large, it was an un-sustainable approach when addressing the fieldwork material. The solution was to use a digital software developed for qualitative analysis. I therefore learned to use Dedoose, an online tool to analyze qualitative and mixed methods research. All the material, including the initial sector interviews, was uploaded to the program in two sets: one set for the material presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 and one for the fieldwork material presented in Chapter 7. The program helped arrange and organize the data, as well as to keep track of codes and themes. However, because coding on the printed material was insightful and appealing, I also printed the codes aggregated as themes to conduct a closer analysis. I appreciated being able to circle, underline or cross out words on paper as I sensed that my overview became tangible in a different way. Such an approach meant that analysis of print and digital material worked in tandem.

All material was generated in a Swedish context and exclusively in the Swedish language, except for interviews with two international students. The material was analyzed in Swedish and later translated into English by the author.

## Reflecting on Challenges

Conducting this study has been both joyful and challenging. It was always a challenge staying true to my constructivist approach, wherein both ethical discussions and reflections play a significant role. Whether engaging in continuous reflections on the choices and interpretations that I made during the research process, it was always a thought-work to reconsider the interpretive and constructivist outlook and not stray into functionalistic thinking (Kvale, 1996). This section revisits some of my arguments for the choices made throughout the dissertation and presents the challenges I encountered.

Constructivist research does not necessarily need to reject the basic idea of concepts such as validity, reliability, and generalizability as such, but it readdresses similar issues to create *trustworthiness* and *credibility* (Czarniawska, 2014; Fine, Morrill, & Surianarain, 2009; Ryen, 2004; Silverman, 2013). A fundamental concept used in qualitative studies is *reflexivity* (not to be confused with keeping an open and reflexive approach to my methods), which includes how I view and approach the field, the empirical material, and especially my own role and how it may impact the fieldwork and my interpretations (c.f., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Buscatto, 2016).

As a means to seek transparency and work towards ensuring my work as credible in an academic context, I have presented my work in various research settings. There have been several forums for this, including the Swedish Research School of Management and IT (MIT), consisting of PhD students and senior academics from 13 Swedish universities. MIT hosted a conference twice a year that was mandatory to participate in for its associated doctoral students; as part of that conference, we were expected to present selected parts of our work. I aimed to present a new part of the dissertation at every conference. At the conference, both the doctoral candidates and the senior researchers provided constructive criticism of my work. I work at the Department of Informatics and Media at Uppsala University, where I continuously presented my work, with three main occasions: the initial thesis proposal (spring, 2013), a halfway seminar (April 2015), and a final seminar (April 2017). I have also been part of a research project studying the governance of universities, with a home base at the Business Department, Uppsala University. My project was partly funded by this project, and I mainly presented and discussed the work on Vice-Chancellor blogs in this group setting. Furthermore, I have presented texts based on my work at academic conferences and seminars as an invited guest.

## On the Field

The field of the research presented some social conditions, including the relationships between the participants working in the studied settings, as well as my own position while conducting the study (Buscatto, 2016). This became particularly visible after I had conducted the “sector interviews” and while doing my observations. The relationships between me and the interviewees *vis-à-vis* the observed participants in the universities and the insights I received were markedly different. I attribute this difference to my more formal role when visiting an interviewee without any extended prior relationship. Hence, our relationship was superficial. However, in the field I developed relationships with the people I studied, mainly in the communication departments. My position did change in this setting, from initially being a visitor to getting to know people and their work more

closely, which impacted how I was met and probably impacted the empirical material. I was invited to meetings that the communicators deemed relevant to my study and I sometimes had to ask for permission to attend the meetings (I was never rejected). Nevertheless, my relationships during the fieldwork were a constant negotiation, most often not for access, but with regards to my role. On one occasion, I was invited to a meeting between a communicator responsible for the university's social media and the communication strategist to participate in their discussion on how to develop their work on Twitter. I was quickly asked about my view and opinion on their work and how they could proceed. In that situation, I felt a need to re-articulate my role as observer and not as an active participant in the work they did. Thankfully, this situation did not occur too often, but the fieldwork posed a need to balance me asking questions and commenting on their actual work. In the example above, I eventually commented on some technical aspects of which I had knowledge, although in general I sought to avoid such interactions.

### **Access and Relationships**

Access to material can be a problem in organizational studies. However, from a historical point of view there have been numerous studies on the Swedish public sector because of its accessibility. In this case, access was not considered a problem. Blog content was available on the respective university blog pages. All the email requests for interviews about social media and the VC blogs were answered quickly and I was put in contact with a representative assumed to be able to answer my questions. My initial question for a field study at Andromeda University was agreed on after a face-to-face meeting with the Communication director where I presented my idea for the fieldwork. I was also positively met at the university at the time of my arrival. It was more problematic to find a second university to agree to participate in my study. After two failed attempts, Centaurus University accepted my invitation. One problem was that they were concerned that my study would interfere with their already busy schedule. My experience at Centaurus University was also that of a generally stressful environment for the communicators. Eventually, I did find time to talk to the individuals identified as relevant for the study. Finally, I felt that I could “find my place” at this university.

During the fieldwork at both universities, the Communication directors introduced me to the personnel at the communication department at the first general meeting after the start of my observation period. At this time, I had the opportunity to present my research and the aim of the study. During the fieldwork and when I met with various people, I often retold the aim of the study, sometimes with a different emphasis depending on whom I talked to (Agar, 1996).

## **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

To get the participants in the fieldwork to feel relaxed and free to talk, I ensured anonymity of responses and maintained confidentiality of the material by ensuring that the fieldwork results would not be linked to an individual person. Initially, I did not plan to keep the selected universities and individuals of the fieldwork anonymized, but it was eventually decided that anonymization would better protect all participants of the study. This approach likely allowed the participants to talk more freely, and on several occasions they asked me again before telling me about their views and opinions if their identities were protected (c.f., Ryen, 2004). A discussion on the necessity of anonymity in public organizations is warranted, and I thought long and hard about keeping the identities of the universities together with representatives from the senior management. Because the Swedish higher education sector is small, I eventually decided on a general anonymity for the two universities of the fieldwork. The material from the fieldwork was anonymized before being uploaded to Dedoose. I consider the sector interviews less sensitive, and announced before each interview that the material would not be anonymized. The interviewees did not react on this issue, but I suspect that the discussions would have been somewhat different if anonymized. The content of the Vice-Chancellor blogs is accessible to anyone who is interested and thus all blogs and their authors are presented.

## **On the Material**

The empirical material that has been analyzed and presented in this dissertation is a network of interconnected meanings. To approach this complex set of meanings, transparency in the way I proceed with the research is essential in order that my story is close to my intentions, as well as my understanding of the results. However, research is always missing pieces and the goal of the researcher is to provide sound interpretations and representations of the material. The interviews and the observations are not to be considered “pictures” of any objective reality, but as interpretations of how employees work with social media. In the extension, these interpretations are the reflections of strategic communication that I present as the outcome of the study.

My role as researcher had an impact on the material in diverse ways: a) the way I interpreted it, b) my presence in the field, and c) the continuous selections made by me in the field and at the desk. I have presented the research techniques and analysis in the sections above, but my views on how the material was affected by me as a researcher is relevant as a way of seeking transparency and credibility. Time spent in the field affects settings, but it is difficult to provide any descriptions of exactly how the settings are impacted. I was always an observer and never a participant (thus a foreign

presence at the universities). However, being governmental authorities, there was a general sense of openness among the employees. Being a public organization, many wanted to speak to me about the “marketization” and “branding” of higher education. Thoughts like these are maybe easier to express when a researcher enters the setting with a critical eye to the operations. However, such ideas are present with or without my presence, but likely not expressed in the same way.

I did not engage in formal “respondent verification”, i.e. I did not send my analysis and results to the participants for a read and verification. However, the lengthy and time spent in the field could be argued for as a form of informal respondent verification due to the relation, the observations, and the discussions with the communicators.

## Chapter Summary

The methodology and method adopted were appropriated according to the initial research problem, research questions, and the theoretical framework. The constructivist view on research is drawn from my readings of the previous research in strategic communication, but mostly from the neo-institutional perspective and understanding of the “nature or reality”. To study the characteristics of strategic communication and how the recipe was made meaningful via the institutional translations, was approached in different steps in which initial findings from the study of VC blogs and interviews with senior university representatives had a primary aim to show the influence of strategic communication on the role of social media in the universities. However, to develop an understanding of the meaning-making (the translations) of strategic communication, multiple methods consisting of observations, interviews, and document analysis were needed and used. The work draws inspiration from ethnography to seek the concepts and understandings present in the universities and the individuals that were included in the study. The chapter presented the methodology and techniques used to answer the theoretically based research questions and the initial problems that were identified and constantly developed.



## PART II – EMPIRICAL STUDY & FINDINGS



## 5. The Role of Social Media in Swedish Universities: A Managerial Perspective

COMMUNICATION IS CONSIDERED an important management function in Swedish universities. This chapter presents what senior university representatives from Swedish universities say about the adoption and use of social media associated with their own universities' work with social media and communication. The text contains the findings on social media's role through the perceptions held by 17 representatives from 16 Swedish universities and university colleges (Appendix 1). The findings indicate a presence of central strategic communication characteristics, reflecting notions of centralization and management control. Furthermore, the findings confirm the approach to communication as support for reaching organizational goals. The findings are presented through the themes of where the notion of *being one university* and *the brand* are points of departure for the purposes of social media. This is followed by an overview of social media as a dialogue and transmission channel and the notion of *integrated communication* to operationalize work with social media. Social media are not only considered tools aimed at recruiting new students and staff, but also to position the university *vis-à-vis* other universities and in society. However, because this chapter is based on interviews with senior representatives, there are limitations in the representation of views in the universities. Nevertheless, the approach is useful as a starting point to supply valuable insights that are later developed in relation to other findings (particularly Chapter 7, which broadens the study to include communicators on all university levels).

### The Purposes of Social Media Communication

This section examines how purposes for which social media are to be used were formulated by the interviewees, containing both internal and external aspects of communication. Coordination and consistency of a university and its messages (the *one university*) and identity work are prevalent goals of internal communication, while the external aims included the university's

branding, reputation, and visibility, which are closely related to the recruitment of students (and staff) and the university's impact in the sector.

Ulrika Frick Lang, the Communication director at Umeå University, provided a good summary of the role of social media and communication at the university. She stated that a university is obliged (by law) to communicate and share the knowledge generated at the university. She further pointed to social media as important instruments for branding and reputation management to attract new students to their programs and courses and to address internal issues and identity.

We have an assignment stated in the Higher Education Act. It is the first time I as a communicator am obliged to communicate, which feels fantastic. But it is important to always reflect on our target groups and that is what the Higher Education Act says, that we are to share the knowledge that is produced. And that can be done differently. Then it is also about communicating our education, which is about attracting new students. But also, the communication with co-workers is extremely important. And that is internal communication, which also includes the students we have here. And then there is the dimension that is a bit new... and difficult to talk about at the universities-- to make yourself as a university visible, and if you want to stick out your neck, you can say *building a brand*. (Frick Lang, UMU)

The purposes of communication are aligned with activities that can be understood as reputation building, or branding though it is also based on an obligation to communicate because it is a government authority. How this is to be achieved can vary at the universities. However, beyond minor differences the perspective of coherence and *one organizational voice* are common denominators. Building on a perspective of consistency, I found social media positioned as communication channels, where the universities seek to create coherence to increase visibility and the university's brand. A more focused aim of social media, while also contributing to branding processes, is found in their use as tools for student recruitment and the management of student relations. Thus, arguments for the use of communication and social media draw on a mix of an increasingly competitive environment while being government authorities. Thus, there is a need to balance issues of legitimacy with branding, reputation, and visibility. However, not all social media channels are considered equally important, but the necessity *to use* social media on a general level is agreed upon by all interviewees. Nevertheless, the channels are seen as relatively new channels, with the knowledge and experience of its use only recently having matured, making the contemporary use viewed as an emergently conscious choice, rather than just a result of jumping onto the bandwagon as was often the case in the past. Social media are therefore understood in the universities as intentionally adopted and used. Following is an overview of how purposes of social media were internally and externally aimed.

## To be *One* University

The Vice-Chancellors and communicators say that being coherent and speaking with one voice is a reasonable approach to deal with a competitive environment. An argument for making universities become more visible is the notion of carrying out the obligation and collaborating with society and sharing knowledge. To act and speak with one voice is regarded as central to communication and communication activities.

### **Coordination and Coherence**

All university communication is said to necessarily need coordination and consistency, so that the university may communicate with its stakeholders and thus convey messages more efficiently. Ann-Charlotte Hansson Schützer, the communicator working closest to the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Gothenburg, described the Vice-Chancellor's perspective in the following way:

...to be perceived as *one* university, that is a mantra from our Vice-Chancellor. It is a main message that she has and brings with her into various occasions. And an important reason for that is that we are judged as *one* university, and that is, for example, how we receive our funding. (Hansson Schützer, GU)

Thus, the aspiration for communication among senior university representatives is to speak and act as a coherent organization. This coherency is also described as “holding it together”, “being consistent”, and “a coordination of messages”. Social media are and act as a single entity to increase a university's chances of becoming stronger, and as such, it will survive and be successful. To achieve this, dialogue between management and co-worker<sup>13</sup> is emphasized. The Communication director at Umeå University acknowledged the importance of internal communication and dialogue to move towards a more consistent university organization, something which she says is a fundamental step that precedes communication with external stakeholders. It is, however, not uncomplicated and she describes this work as an ongoing process (like the other interviews, where no university is fully integrated or acting as a coherent entity), but nevertheless a constantly present and pressing goal. From this perspective, *coordination* is an approach that includes all components of the universities, based on the argument that everyone will make gains from being an integrated part of the university. However, instead of being perceived as parts relating to a whole, the goal is to create a unified whole consisting of various parts (e.g., departments). In the material, I could identify the work of

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<sup>13</sup> “Co-worker” (*medarbetare* in Swedish) is the preferred label in the universities. I acknowledge their use, but will continuously freely use co-worker or employee when referring to the members of the universities.

holding the organization together as a more clearly pronounced ideal among the larger and older universities, where a higher number of faculties and departments, “sub-brands” (e.g., research groups or institutes) and geographically dispersed units are viewed as strengths, but also causes for an active work of coordination efforts and initiatives. At Linköping University (a larger university) the coordination was a central issue, here described by their communication director:

There are gains to be made when coordinating communication. The university has had a culture of letting all flowers flourish. And they all get to do that. But in this context of competition it doesn't work. Because if you want to reach out, then research groups by themselves are not strong enough brands. And then we must gather [...] The Vice-Chancellor talks about *one* Linköping University, we talk one university. And we should keep it together. The Vice-Chancellor is working with a strategy map, where the top bubble is being a university with an international glow. And that is really what we all work towards. It is what this should all lead up to. You need to get it together because you can't run around shooting with a shotgun not knowing what you may hit. (Larsson, LIU)

Universities are multifaceted organizations, which is acknowledged as part of the nature of being a university. This multifaceted attribute is considered “good thing”, but at the same time it poses a risk for fragmentation and a lack of coordination. Hence, issues of academic freedom and the freedom of the individual working for a governmental organization are centered, but not perceived by the interviewees as under threat by coordination efforts for social media, which are regarded as guiding (positive) rather than controlling (negative). However, because the condition for employees to speak freely is widely agreed upon, the notion of being one university boils down to the use of a consistent graphical profile across social media and communication activities, as exemplified by the Communication director at Stockholm University:

...there is an idea of an overarching and coherent communication. But it also means a large degree of freedom for the individual. But as an organization, we should communicate consistently. All our departments are the university and that should be visible in the form of a certain graphical profile. And there we have great loyalty through use of the tools and support that exist for the departments' participation. (Mauritzon, SU)

### **One University, One Identity**

Striving towards appearing as *one* university is centered on profile management or a “proper” use of the logotype. Furthermore, when working towards one university, attention to *values* and *identity* are focal points in university communication management. At Malmö University, the Vice-Chancellor recalled how students at his former employer (Chalmers

Technical University) quickly adopted a university identity identified as “Chalmerists” (i.e. a student at Chalmers). He described his current university as struggling with its identity and having students that may not as easily adopt a sense of belonging or sharing a joint identity. The students are considered central bearers of what a university stands for and part of its brand.

Malmö is a young university. There is a great contrast between Chalmers and Malmö in the sense that the students at Chalmers are quickly integrated, becoming “Chalmerists”. This happens fast. There is a keen sense for the brand and a unity. That is much tougher here. (Bengtsson, MAH)

Based on sentiments like this, the interviewees presented the use of social media (especially Facebook and Instagram) to be among the main channels to integrate and manage the relations and perceptions of students. However, having identifiable values are necessary for the coordination of both students and employees at a university. A foundation to impact external perceptions at a later stage of the communication process is also necessary. For example, at the University of Gothenburg, a report of how the university was perceived by external stakeholders was commissioned to supply a basis for internal identity development. The results pointed to an external image that was fragmented. To develop and establish what the university stood for was then addressed, where *social responsibility* was identified as a core value and direction for the university to pursue and communicate. Thus, working with core values is a way to approach and work with fragmented and disorganized organizations among the universities. At Mid Sweden University, a “brand book” was developed containing the values that the communication department had been working on. The aim was to anchor them in the organization. *Openness* is one such value and another was the importance of being *transparent* to stakeholders when communicating with the use of social media. To have such values gives employees tools that they can adopt to become part of a unified university and take part in what the university stands for. Returning to the University of Gothenburg, the changing and challenging environment is seen as a cause and thus there is a need to actively work with identifying central values:

Communication is about making clear what the university stands for. We face increased competition, pressure from the government to clarify what we want with the university. This is a university. But what is a university? What is the University of Gothenburg? Currently, we have a Vice-Chancellor that believes that it is important to contribute to the city and the region. And that is part of our vision: we should assume a societal responsibility. (Hansson Schützer, GU)

Ann-Charlotte Hansson-Schützer addresses the issue of what the university's essence is and what it stands for, without being able to clearly define the answer.

### **Creating One University: An Informational Task**

In this context, the social media development is perceived to play a vital role because these channels provide new technical features and opportunities. For example, it provides faster communication, and a less formal tone that leads to the *diffusion of information* from management to employees. This is especially the case when sharing and discussing decisions made by the university management, developments in the sector that are associated or relevant to the university, and ideas about and what the university stands for (e.g., the content of a communication policy or strategy). However, the internal perspective is mainly limited to reside in the hands of the university leadership, with an informational direction from senior management to employees. The views and opinions of the university management that are considered necessary for employees to take part of are shared in the formal channels (e.g., as digitally available policy document or even e-mails), but can be presented in a less formal manner when communicated via social media such as the Vice-Chancellor blog. A larger number of the universities' employees are perceived to be able to be reached more effectively because of the blog. Social media and the Vice-Chancellor blog are considered tools to aid the construction of a coherent university identity through sharing and promoting centrally developed values as seen in, for example, vision documents or as held by the Vice-Chancellor. This indicates that social media are adopted to provide easier and faster access to central ideas of what the university is all about. At universities where a Vice-Chancellor blogs is operational, these are considered a key channel for this type of identity management and organizational governance (more on this in the following chapter). The Communication director at Uppsala University depicted the role of the blog in relation to promoting central university management ideas and insight into the daily work by the university management:

*Me:* What is the purpose of the Vice-Chancellor blog?

*Björk:* Well, it is to follow what the Vice-Chancellor and the VC office does, both internally and externally. [Another purpose] is to follow the university's life when it comes to the important things and to make visible their everyday work in some way.

*Me:* Why is this so?

*B:* Because we also want to communicate the goals and strategies we want to work with. And you will notice that if you read the blog. [...] We have not



had an internal channel to communicate with our employees. Before we just used e-mails.

By delivering pieces of information on “who we are” and “what we are doing”, the Vice-Chancellor blog has emerged as a channel to influence and shape the essence of a university by providing opportunities for the Vice-Chancellor to be more personal and less formal. The informality of the blog, and consequently, the personal views on university related issues, makes the blog “more inviting to its readers” (VC, Stockholm University).

Related to, and often based on, the internal aim of an overall integration of communication is the adoption and use of social media in the shaping of a university brand. The *one* university ideal is hence viewed as a core condition for the university to be both apprehensible and attractive.

## Social Media and Communication with External Stakeholders

An argument to adopt social media as communication channels is related to the governmental assignment to share knowledge and collaborate with society. However, to only share research results and collaborating with the surrounding environment via social media are regarded as limited, and the societal responsibility is perceived to be intimately connected to that of the brand and reputation of a university. Accordingly, if not recognized in the sector, the relations to society are thought to suffer. Communication is seen as a necessary organizational function for collaborative measures, but at the same time, it is closely related to the issues of student and staff recruitment, of receiving research grants and university funding, and of status and recognition in the higher education sector. Tending to the brand is therefore promoted to achieve a good reputation and image. Smaller and younger universities, together with the university colleges, face problems when engaged in a competition with the older and bigger universities. There is a perceived imbalance in terms of attention and recognition, and at the smaller and younger universities, an identification of a necessity for them to work harder with communication in order to be granted their rightful status in academia. For example, at Mälardalen University (a university college), they have to continuously and actively attend their brand via communication planning and activities if they hope to impact the sector and society. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Borås similarly acknowledged a bias that favors the older, larger, and established universities, especially when it comes to funding and receiving grants.

There is a hierarchy. The older, established universities have an advantage if we talk about the competitive environment. We must work harder and point to our strengths. That's a fact. [...] What they do is great, of course. For example, Chalmers is a great university when it comes to quality of education and research, but it is not about that. (Brorström, HIB)

However, the perceived intensified competition is a legitimate argument to intensify work with communication and social media at the larger and older universities. This is because higher education is not only viewed as a national matter, but also as an international one, which requires efforts to stay competitive in an international market. At KTH Royal Institute of Technology, the Vice-Chancellor explained communication as either internal or external (external communication is about the brand for both national and international purposes). The Communication director at Linköping University pointed out that they compete with tens of thousands of international universities worldwide and that branding in such an environment is crucial:

The big picture is that there are 17.000 universities in the world. Youth today have the entire world to apply to. Maybe, it is a smaller group that does that, but it is very accessible to the many. The competitive awareness has generally increased among the universities - it is not enough to be yourself. If you are to be on the world map, with MOOC education and all the digital access, then you must work and communicate to be seen and heard and be active on this map. (Larsson, LIU)

The quote by Larsson points to several issues. One issue is of awareness and therefore a need to be active in order not to fall behind other universities. A second issue concerns increased access and ease to study unbound by the traditional form of attending a campus. The final issue concerns an international perspective on recruitment. The brand is not intended to be a necessity for the sake of branding, but considered vital for the university's existence.

### **To Be Chosen by Students**

The interviewees share a commonality in recognizing the importance of the university being seen, i.e. its visibility. At university colleges (e.g., Borås and Skövde), the need for visibility is said to be needed not only to compete, but also to justify the university and "show that it exists" (VC, University of Borås). The quality of education and research is not seen as a sufficient criterion, but they also need to "prove" their eligibility to the students and the society. Older and larger universities also focus on visibility: for example, at Lund University, the Vice-Chancellor is thought to have the necessary utterance to "increase visibility" (Lars Uhlin, Lund University). Being visible requires a strong brand. Yet, at the older and larger universities, interviewees did not stress the need to justify their university, but rather saw visibility and the brand as beneficial in the competition for students, employees, and funding. Social media serve an integral part in this and used with a focus on selected areas, most importantly for student relations and recruitment (mainly via Facebook and Instagram), publishing and sharing opinions and information (mainly via Twitter and Facebook),

and as employer branding (mainly via LinkedIn). The role of print media is thought to be decreasing as a place for university marketing and communication, with digital media channels and activities replacing traditional print campaigns. Social media, together with the official homepage, emerge as primary means of connecting with prospective and current students. An argument for the use of social media is related to the necessity of “being where the students are”, as illustrated by Anna Andersson Ax from Mälardalen University:

Me: What role does social media have?

Andersson Ax: Well, in a student-recruiting context it is very important. We are on Facebook, we are on Twitter, and we are on Instagram. We jumped on the bandwagon together with everyone else because *this is where we should be visible*. Though that was kind of a flop because we did not have a plan about why we were there. But now it is clear that we should be where the students are.

Even though several social media channels are used, Facebook is the primary platform with regards to students because the university is aware that most students use Facebook. Social media are used to inform current students on what goes on at the university, as well as and on various practical student-related matters. The students are also viewed as potential university ambassadors and hence part of building the university brand, and in the extension, the students become student recruiters. Mid Sweden University’s Communication director explains this view:

We have said that Facebook, on our official Facebook account, students are the main target group. For current students, it is very much about building the brand and making them good ambassadors to recruit new students. (Strandh, MIUN)

The use of Instagram is based on a similar idea, i.e. it is a way to construct an image displaying what the university is about, often with the help of current students and presumptive students as the main target group.

### **A Mandate to Communicate**

Having a competitive “edge” is viewed as based in a strong brand. The views of branding in higher education are precarious in that it is regarded as necessary because of current conditions, but also as the *new* (and often unwanted) *kid on the block*: being a government authority carries different values than a for-profit organization. Instead, quality in education and research is the foundation for a university’s operations, but the problem is perceived as quality not selling itself, something a strong brand is thought to aid by making the university and its offer more visible, understandable, and

desirable. Thus, the idea of more communication. Closely related to the ideas of visibility is the issue of displaying the university's *use* to the society. The sharing of research is not directly pronounced as “(corporate) social responsibility” (CSR), but as a necessary and legitimate function associated with the nature of being a university. The interviewees refer to this as “the third assignment” (in Swedish: “tredje uppgiften”), which is equally important in providing education and performing research. It is also based on the notion of transparency, i.e. it demonstrates a worth for public investment in the universities. Communication is therefore adopted to highlight the activities of a university, to share knowledge and insights from ongoing research, and be an active voice in society. At Uppsala University, Lund University, Stockholm University, and Umeå University the representatives highlighted the opportunity to engage stakeholders in social media, and simultaneously contributing to the visibility of the university while emphasizing openness.

As a university, we are bound by “the third assignment”. We are obliged to tell what we do and to show the use of the tax money going into the university. And we must make it comprehensible to the public and other groups. We have to be transparent. But then we also have the aspect of working strategically with communication, where we are active in affecting the image of the university. Working with the package in a larger perspective-- our brand. Can we become more attractive? Can we enhance our competitiveness? (Uhlén, LU)

At the University of Skövde (a smaller college university), a similar approach was presented, but emphasized that to be significant among peers in higher education requires a carefully directed effort to even be heard. Thus, branding efforts to increase visibility are crucial. Without attention, there is no one to listen to what a university has to say.

To be visible in the public debate we targeted employees, the local society and our parliamentary representatives. The VC succeeded in that work. Then our budget was balanced and confidence in us increased. First-hand applicants increased by 37%. It was previously low. We had the second-best increase in the country. [...] We have worked hard to prove and show our qualities. Sweden needs a broad academic landscape. (Snäll, HIS)

When using social media for the above-mentioned purposes, Twitter is especially useful to distribute and share news and press releases from the university aimed at journalists, politicians, decision makers and others in the sector. It is presented as a quick and easy platform to spread and share information, as well as to exercise influence by providing press releases and information on what is going on at a university. Media relations and press information are complemented with Twitter and it is not regarded as a means to replace any other work in this area.

## Alumni Relations and Employer Branding

Alumni relations and employer branding are also aims of social media usage in the universities, particularly by employing LinkedIn. However, LinkedIn is only briefly discussed by the interviewees, with arguments that it is a new and undeveloped channel that they did not ask for but should consider because of large followings of the already existing accounts<sup>14</sup>. The purpose includes building and maintaining relations with alumni, as well as a place to manage the brand for potential employees. This work was in an early stage at the time of the study, but the general idea was to retain and develop alumni relations, researchers and other staff, hoping they will serve as ambassadors for potential new employees and recruit new students.

## Aspiring to Dialogue: Transmission as Routine

The adoption of social media encompasses a notion of dialogue when adopted as communication channels. Thus, the technical affordances facilitate interactivity and favorable connections between the university and its stakeholders. Still, there is a separation between viewing social media as channels and forum for dialogue and using the channels for one-way information dissemination. The Communication director at Umeå University harshly addressed the current use of social media:

Is it really *social* media or just *mass* media when you keep pumping information onto your Facebook? (Frick Lang, UMU)

The interviewees acknowledge the potential for dialogue, and while it is a praised ideal, efforts to engage students and other stakeholders are failing, which often renders use of social media as one-way communication channels. Enabling dialogue is problematic for several reasons. First, the copious amounts of information “out there” are making it difficult to break through and be heard. Second, the number of stakeholders make it difficult to engage in fruitful dialogue. Third, because of little experience, there are insecurities of university communicators’ use of social media.

Although the interviewees claim to aspire towards dialogue and increased opportunities for interaction, they acknowledge failure to engage in dialogue. This failure is described as a problem of inexperience residing at the university (the communicators). The situation is portrayed to render an “incorrect” use of social media, where insecurities and lack of experience are combined. The potential for dialogue is perceived to be inherent in the technologies. Thus, the problems are associated with the actual and current

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<sup>14</sup> University accounts are automatically created by LinkedIn and exist whether a university is active or not.

use of the channels rather than the approach to communication itself. The adoption and use are viewed to be in a process of maturation and the gained experiences over time have generated a sense of what the different channels *are for* (i.e. how to use them in terms of content and tone and how to engage and with whom). The interviewees do present another problem: the number of people that are active on social media is too large to handle efficaciously. For example, at Mid Sweden University there have been attempts to engage in dialogue on social media but the attempts were considered largely unsuccessful because of the substantial number of users. Thus, it was deemed impossible to have a fruitful exchange with thousands of presumptive and current students simultaneously.

We try to create dialogue as well as we can, but we haven't succeeded very well. I think it is just too big - we have about 8000 students. It's too broad. Dialogue is better suited when carving a niche, and we have probably not reached all the way with our messages. (Strandh, MIUN)

Although dialogue is a shared and celebrated ideal, the reports from the interviewees suggest limited efforts to engage in dialogue between the universities and their stakeholders. Thus, "to inform" is often put first in activities with stakeholders while social media as a site for dialogue is put second. Interactions, as initiated by stakeholders, are not further dealt with by the interviewees. The interviewees retain an organizational perspective on communication and the application of social media. For example, in the Vice-Chancellor blog, dialogue is not pronounced as a goal, but largely interpreted as a one-way channel to disperse opinions and information (this notion is developed further in Chapter 6). Nevertheless, the informational strategy is viewed as limiting the opportunities that "actually exist", with Facebook being a prime channel and where dialogue is perceived to have the greatest potential owing to the fact that that is *where the students are*.

As should be apparent, social media are perceived as affording something new, but in a process of maturation in which the roles alongside other communication channels are starting to stabilize. They are therefore regarded as just another set of instruments in the communication toolbox.

We have made a little journey. We started a Facebook account about three years ago. And we used it - like most did at the time - as an information channel. We published some information on what we did-- some press releases. It didn't happen that much. So, we started working actively to get as many "likes" as possible. But we didn't get much activity. Then we decided that this part of social media was going to be a meeting place for students, or those that want to study here or just have questions. We pretty much pulled back and instead encouraged them to ask questions about studying, and so on. Immediately things started to happen. They asked questions. And that is how we use Facebook now. (Snäll, HIS)

By following and engaging identified target groups and the corresponding social media channels, the universities are in a better position to influence these groups. And, according to the interviewees, there is no self-value in being active on social media, but university presence is attributed to that of the students, journalists, and politicians being active on various social media platforms.

## Working with Social Media

Producing a consistent voice that represents the university was a theme underpinning the views on how social media should be put into action. When aiding the university to reach its goals, clear notions on how to organize and handle social media and communication are presented: what to do, how to do it, and where to do it. The university representatives shared views on who is to be responsible for overseeing and operating social media, and how apply controls for this. The assumptions surrounding the organizing and handling of social media included those of centralized control, but also a discussion on the relation to decentralized control and how these are related to the overall coordination of the university's communication. Central to the management of social media are the communication departments that run all of a university's official social media accounts, and, even though not directly controlling local university accounts (such as a faculty Twitter account), they are to maintain an overall responsibility and coordination. However, while initiatives of engaging and working with social media throughout universities are encouraged, the views on central control are tangible through an emphasis on central communication planning and activities and official documents that include tips and tricks and guidelines for how to properly handle an official university account to coordinate activities and messages. However, the planning and organizing of social media also create conflicts of control and responsibilities.

### Centralized Activities and Responsibility

The role of the universities' communication departments shares two characteristics in relation to the management of social media: 1) the operational responsibility of the official university social media accounts (“@university”) and 2) the responsibility for the overarching coordination efforts and activities to create consistency. The official accounts represent the university and are said to be operated directly by the communication department. The main aim of central and official social media accounts is to bridge and overarch a university and its parts so all are represented. At the University of Gothenburg, Ann-Charlotte Hansson-Schützer stressed the responsibility of the communication department to actively manage the

university's communication thanks to their "privileged" position and overview:

I believe that a communication department on a central level, especially at a decentralized university like ours with many strong brands, has a responsibility of having a helicopter perspective. It is not the responsibility of individuals, but it is in some way ours to see and identify the needs and what is common, what we may coordinate, and the gains that can be made from that. It is obvious that it belongs at this central level. (Hansson Schützer, GU)

The University of Gothenburg is one of the larger Swedish universities, with eight faculties that represent almost forty departments. In the interview, the university is described as large, with decentralized responsibilities and control, but also with a fragmented public image (i.e. a university in need of central coordination). Lund University is presented with similar wordings, being described as multi-faceted by the interviewees, which is approached through active communication work in which the communication department produces the shared messages and values of the university and a common graphical profile to address the problem and coordinate the organization. The idea of centralized communication is perhaps most obvious at Mid Sweden University, where centralization of communication was an assignment for the Communication director when she first started working there as an effort to make the university's communication more effective:

My first assignment, which was already decided when I started, was to centralize communication. In relation to that I started a project to review the communication at the university. We made an investigation on how to deliver most value to the organization. [...] We looked at research on successful communication departments and we conducted interviews at other universities that had been working with centralization. From that, we created a list on what a successful communication department is, and based on that analysis, we got our assignment. (Strandh, MIUN)

At Karlstad University, the coordination efforts were depicted based on the identification of target groups: that when you contact the university, you should be able to receive coherent messages and information from anywhere within the organization. In the universities' coordination of communication social media are conceived of as "any other channel".

### **Creating a Framework for Everyone**

With centralization, comes the task for the communication department to create a framework for social media in which the rest of the university can relate to. At Linnaeus University, such a task is given attention because it is a young university with operations in Växjö and Kalmar. "Holding it together" through centralization is portrayed as important because the



university wants to avoid double work and unintentional competition. Ingrid Persson, the Communication director, underlines the necessity of one voice and the work at the central location:

All the press information goes through us [the communication department]. It is only us. One sender. However, the raw material comes from others. But that is because we know when during the day we should publish it, and we don't want two news pieces to kill each other. (Persson, LNU)

From this, we see that social media adoption is managed by a centrally produced framework to ensure the university and its communication and messages are consistent. The coordination of social media often requires that employees throughout a university report back to the communication department about their activities. When talking with the Communication director at Linköping University about coordination and social media she said the following:

...it is completely integrated. [...] We have guidelines, and in them employees can read that they should report to us. We have two people here centrally that in are working exclusively with social media. They are to support those who want to start a new account, but also receive a notification when someone starts one so we know which channels and accounts we have. (Larsson, LIU)

When talking about how they are working with social media in the universities, I was told that is integrated into an overall communication work, although there were issues with control and the difficulties of complete overview. Centralization and decentralization of control and responsibilities are continuously negotiated between local users and the communication department.

## Decentralization and Local Responsibilities

In addition to underlining the importance of centralized control, the interviews revealed tensions between the centralization and decentralization of social media use. The representatives report the importance of consistency, but also stress the freedom of the employees to be able to access, write, and respond independently in social media. The issues that the centrally planned communication then faces are not only about how the university is able to produce consistent messages or not, but also includes a perspective in which social media is viewed as personal, dependent on localized control and responsibilities, and needing local voices to be trustworthy, which, on the surface, conflicts with the ideals of integration and consistency.

*Decentralization* is a recurring theme in the interviews and considered a basic premise for university communication, “allowing” and encouraging local initiatives and activities. The communication department, however, is to provide an umbrella under which all the university’s communication takes place. Professional communicators are mainly located at the communication department, but recently there are initiatives to place an increasing number of communication professionals in different sections of the universities (e.g., at the University Gothenburg where the aim is to have “communication competency” at all departments).

The university is going through a re-organization, called *Renew GU*, and it states that there should be one communicator, or communication competency at every department. It does not explicitly define how it should be done, but it is a work in progress. [...] There are different views of what we should do centrally and on what should be done at the departments. I think there will be a dialogue between the communication department, our new Communication director, and the heads of the departments. So, I guess it will manifest itself differently at the departments, depending on the conditions. (Sjövind, GU)

Also, at Mid Sweden, Umeå, and Lund University, the interviewees reported that their universities have a decentralized communication structure, with the communication department acting as an umbrella and responsible unit. But decentralization was also problematized in the universities, where, for example, the Communication director at Umeå University worried about fragmentation and the quality of communication:

Frick Lang: Social and digital media have always been important to us because that is where we work. But we also have a very decentralized communication organization and responsibility at the university, which is almost extreme. We are among those who have taken it the furthest. This may be a challenge when seeking to keep quality and not appear fragmented. It has maybe gone too far.

Me: What do you mean with “too far”?

FL: ...that we have chosen to assign all responsibility for student recruitment to the programs themselves. [...] It is really tricky because you need knowledge, the close knowledge of the operations to understand it. But you also need specialist knowledge.

The universities are governmental organizations with freedom of speech for all its employees and academic freedom is centralized for researchers. Consequently, coordination efforts are understood as difficult, the issue of fragmentation arises as a threat to the coordination and *one* university, and ultimately a challenge for the brand. Research groups, employees, and departments have their own social media accounts and they are encouraged

to use digital channels and reach out to their stakeholders, preferably with the help of the communication department or according to communication and social media guidelines. The next section develops the views on the universities' approach to formalized guidelines and rules for communication and how such are produced.

## Social Media and Communication Documents

The formalization of control of social media in universities range from using documents describing “tips and tricks” for social media platforms in relation to their affordances to documents regulating the adoption and use on a more overarching university level. However, whatever the degree of control sought after through documents produced to regulate social media, coordinated communication remains a fundamental norm. The Communication director at Linköping University illustrates the notion of consistency of communication by focusing on the university's branding process when creating guiding documents:

What can be said is that when we have been working with branding, there is an orientation that we will push on those who communicate. That *this* is what we want to communicate. This is what we want people to think and feel when they read about us, so relate to this when you write. It is like a direction that becomes clear. But of course, there is no on saying *this* you cannot write about. I don't believe in pointers in this world. It is about being supportive. (Larsson, LIU)

The ideas of coordination and the central ideas for communication are found between views of “how and what to do” in terms of communication work and to some extent freedom in local communication. The representatives' description of social media-related documents hints that only a few are called “policy” or “strategy”, but instead named “guides” or “handbooks” to appear less coercive and serve as an aid the communicator. Strategies and policies for social media are needed earlier to address the immature nature of social media use and experience, something that today is about to change when communicators are accustomed to social media, as underlined by Lars Uhlin at Lund University:

Social media are becoming increasingly integrated. [...] Five years ago, when it was new, it was good to separate social media, but now it is not necessary. (Uhlin, LU)

Another reason for not using policies or strategies for social media is that they are considered “just another set of communication channels” that operate under the overarching communication documents (communication policy, communication strategy, crisis plan) and provide employees enough

structure and support when working with social media. This perspective is also reflected in the view of social media as maturing and being one channel among others. Ingrid Persson at Linnæus University argued for a development of a “natural” integration of social media into the university’s communication:

Persson: We don’t have a social media strategy and I am not sure we need one either.

Me: How come?

P: Well... I believe it is more important to do things that fit the right context. It is just a channel among others.

Me: So, is it connected to communication strategies or policy?

P: Yes, we look at every issue and what is suitable. We can, of course, work much more strategically with social media. [...] But we think that it is part of the regular communication, and just because it is a new channel doesn’t mean that you need a strategy for it. You know, companies once had telephone policies.

Being a governmental authority also provides a framework for how to work with communication and social media. The governmental context was clearly reflected in the views of the Communication director at the University of Skövde:

Snäll: We work according to a governmental policy for how to...

Me: So, you don’t need a specific document?

S: No, I don’t think it’s necessary. But then you need help to interpret what things mean in a specific situation. But we don’t need to write a lot of policies. [...] What you do over the phone, email, or say to someone, that is just as much you as a government employee, and you have to take responsibility for that just as well as on Facebook or Twitter. I prefer counseling and giving advice rather than having policy.

## The Developing Approach to and Role of Social Media

Because the coordination of communication is a recurring theme, so is the planning of social media. As Ingrid Persson points out some paragraphs above, social media are regarded as channels among others, and as communication channels they become subordinated to the overarching communication ideas and planning. However, the specifics of each channel are addressed by variously titled documents that consider social media as a

new type of communication channel that is in a stage of maturation, but not yet fully “naturalized”, and therefore, in need of continued support and coordination. The active take on managing social media is then due to its relative newness and its maturation process, but also to reduce the risk of being perceived as fragmented because of a lack of communication management. The similarities of social media planning among the universities are visible in the notion of not wanting to apply too much control, but at the same time seeking consistency. Differences are seen to the extent of social media being perceived as something new and the trust of employees knowing what to do.

To be tough or not, it is difficult to answer. [...] We have been ambivalent as to how much policy we should have. [...] It is better to encourage communication than trying to close it down and make it complicated. But when we get questions about this and that, or if there are no target groups, then we have a central function that works with approving or not approving social media accounts. (Ulrika Frick Lang, UMU)

Conceptions of social media’s development and role at the universities are key to understanding the current standing of its planning process. Social media have gone through a developing process from being “new” communication technologies to a status where they are considered more familiar and integrated into everyday communication. When social media appeared, they were considered fragmented and used without trying to integrate them into the overall communication system. The attempts of producing social media strategies were at the time of this study being replaced with initiatives focusing on solutions to technical issues (e.g., how to use hashtags (#), how to plan for the opening or continuous management of an account, or how to identify target groups and the importance of developing a clear purpose. With few exceptions (e.g., Lund university), these initiatives have not materialized into strategies or policy documents but have instead been used to develop less formal documents. At Umeå University, a project was initiated to develop a social media policy, but was soon questioned if it was necessary, or even possible. They soon stopped the project but used the findings to create simple guiding documents containing “tips and tricks” to be shared among the employees. Mid Sweden University developed a digital plan and a digital handbook with suggestions and guidelines on how to work with social media. At Lund University, previous work with social media documents was revisited and used in new advisory documents for coordination - called a “guide” and materialized in the form of a wiki accessible on their homepage<sup>15</sup>:

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<sup>15</sup> Lund University’s social media wiki: [lu.se/socialamedier](http://lu.se/socialamedier)

Uhlin: We developed a strategy about five years ago. And one could say that its principal idea is still alive today.

Me: So, it was a document separate from the communication...

U: ...it was for social media. How we would handle the most important social media. [...] Then it is also about coordination.

In the interview with the communicators at Lund University, we continued the discussion on the role of social media and how it is governed. It was later clarified on how they view these guiding documents:

Me: Is it [the guiding document] more advisory? Like if you set up an account on Facebook – this is what you must relate to.

Uhlin: It is advisory. We have a guide for social media on the web. And it is in a wiki format, so we keep updating it. And it is only as a guide; it contains advice. And that is what we give. When we started it about three years ago, we talked about having guidelines for this. But we realized that we can't have guidelines. We can't have a policy, so let us have it as a guide instead.

The backbone for all university communication, and hence the role of social media, seems to be departing from the content of the *communication policy* and *communication strategies*. As channels among others, specifics of social media are addressed in the newly formulated documents (the guide and handbooks). However, the integration of all communication includes social media, which is still developing and facing problems (e.g., problems regarding central and local control, or the idea of social media being a personal medium, which is challenged by integration efforts).

## Chapter Summary

I acknowledge how the views of senior representatives offer a limited representation of the universities, echoing dominant approaches in previous studies in strategic communication by retaining a management perspective. I argue that these insights provide a departure point, with relevant findings to understand the bigger frame for communication in organizations. A managerial perspective is useful as these representatives are part of, or working close, to the “dominant coalition”, making decisions impacting the communication work at the universities (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2015; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). All the representatives report that their universities are using social media as part of their communication. The present findings show a presence of conventional strategic communication in the form of a focus on centralization and centralized responsibility of social media, based

on a belief of being part of the one university and the contribution to the university brand. The communication departments coordinate all activities and content in social media by working directly with the channels and through centrally produced governing documents to support and guide central and non-central social media accounts. Work with social media is based in the notion of being *one* university, as both branding, reputation, and organizational values and identity are understood as based in a unified organization. However, the control and centralization aspects are contradicted by perceptions of an “inherent” logic of social media to be in need of a local voice and decentralized responsibilities and in the notion of being a university and governmental organization includes the freedom of all employees to communicate without central interference. The Vice-Chancellors and the communicators discussed the risk of being perceived as fragmented, which would impact the brand and reputation, student recruitment, and visibility in the sector and society negatively. A fragmented university and university communication could, in turn, undermine the university’s interactions and collaborations with stakeholders. The role of social media is therefore presented from the perspective of a necessary coordination while also trying to accommodate local voices and freedom of communicators across a university.

This chapter studied a management perspective on social media from representatives of 16 Swedish universities. In the following chapter on Vice-Chancellor blogs, the perspective is retained. Insights from these first empirical chapters are developed in Chapter 7 when “all voices” working with social media are identified and studied through fieldwork at two universities.





## 6. The Role of Vice-Chancellor Blogs<sup>16</sup>

IN THIS CHAPTER, findings from the study of the role of the Vice-Chancellor blogs<sup>17</sup> in Swedish universities are presented. The findings relate to the structure of the preceding chapter as they are based on the same empirical material and thus examine similar questions and issues. The purpose of studying Vice-Chancellor blogs was to understand how a social media channel representing the most senior university representative was contextualized and operated in relation to the assumptions strategic communication. An assumption of the dissertation is that strategic communication is institutionalized; as such, it provides organizations and individuals with legitimized ways of working with communication, including blogs. However, the local organizational context, each user's intentions and experiences, and the technical affordances of each channel produce conditions that influence how a communication channel is adopted and translated in organizations. Blogs, which are used on diverse levels in different organizations, can still be considered new communication channels in organizations. The Vice-Chancellor blog is a recently adopted channel among universities. Vice-Chancellors possess a unique position in universities and are, in accordance with the ideals of strategic communication, operating centrally from a top-management position. The use of Vice-Chancellor blogs is therefore sensible to consider when studying universities' social media adoption. Indeed, its role is an expression reflecting how a social media channel has been made meaningful at a high university level, but also reveals the Vice-Chancellor's relationship and approach to communication and social media. Like Chapter 5, the findings are based on interviews with senior university representatives. Hence, the findings represent a managerial perspective on communication.

The numbers and years in this chapter may at a first glance appear a bit "messy". The content and findings are based on a content analysis of all active Vice-Chancellor blogs at Swedish universities in 2011-2012 (Appendix 5) and 13 interviews with representatives from 12 Swedish universities and university colleges with active blogs (conducted in spring 2014) (Appendix 1). All but one of the blogs that acted as a base for the

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<sup>16</sup> A version of this text is published as a chapter in the anthology *Det ostyrd universitetet?*, edited by Wedlin and Pallas (2017).

<sup>17</sup> With *role*, I refer to both that which influences its use and the uses for which it is adopted.

interviews 2014 remained active in June 2016. Some of the blogs underwent minor changes, one was deactivated, and a few new blogs had been started.

Before presenting the findings, an overview is presented of the Swedish Vice-Chancellor blogosphere anno 2016 to introduce the reader to the field of Vice-Chancellor blogging. Next, a presentation of the content in the VC blogs 2011-2012 is given. Based on findings from the interviews, the chapter stresses the *purpose and goals of the blog* (for Vice-Chancellor positioning, university identity, branding and reputation), the *perspective on communication* (one-way communication), and the perspective of *how to organize and operate the blog* (un-coordinated to the overall university communication).

## The Swedish Vice-Chancellor Blogosphere Anno 2016

In June 2016, there were 15 Vice-Chancellor blogs active at Swedish universities (Table 5). Two years earlier, when the interview study was conducted in 2014, there were 12 active VC blogs (this temporally increased to 16 when four more blogs became active) (at Chalmers University of Technology, Umeå University, Linnaeus University, and Karolinska Institutet). However, one blog was cancelled during this period (the blog at Karlstad University was dropped during the autumn 2015)<sup>18</sup>. Kåre Bremer, an earlier Vice-Chancellor at Stockholm University, started the first Swedish VC blog in June 2005<sup>19</sup>. Astrid Söderbergh Widding overtook Bremer's position as Vice-Chancellor in 2013, deciding to continue the blogging activity. Furthermore, in 2005 Lena Nordholm<sup>20</sup>, the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Borås, started the second VC blog in Sweden. From the start in 2005 with two active VC blogs, it took another five years before the phenomenon was introduced to other universities. Fewer blogs have lately been started; instead, the character of the existing blogs is changing.

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<sup>18</sup> In an e-mail conversation with the person from the interview study, I was told that the blog was "resting" because of re-prioritization and time constraints.

<sup>19</sup> The blog is also available as a book (see Bremer (2013)).

<sup>20</sup> Lena Nordholm's blog at the University of Borås was operational in 2005-2011, but was un-accessible at the time of study and therefore excluded from the content analysis.

Table 5. Active Vice-Chancellor blogs June 2016

<i>University</i>	<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Blog start/changed or cancelled</i>
<i>Stockholm University (SU)</i>	Kåre Bremer (VC)/Astrid Söderbergh Widding (VC)	2005 June/2013 February
<i>University of Borås (HB)</i>	Lena Nordholm (VC)/Björn Brorström (VC)	2005 October/2011 August
<i>Lund University (LU)</i>	Per Eriksson (VC) + deputy VC/Torbjörn von Schantz	2010 April/2016 January
<i>Mid Sweden University (MIUN)</i>	Anders Söderholm (VC)	2010 December
<i>KTH Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)<sup>21</sup></i>	Peter Gudmundson (VC)	2011 January
<i>Mälardalen University (MDH)</i>	Karin Röding (VC)/Paul Pettersson (Acting VC)	2011 April <sup>22</sup> /2016 January
<i>Malmö University (MAH)</i>	Stefan Bengtsson (VC) + deputy VC + 2 vice rectors/Kerstin Tham (VC) + deputy VC + 2 vice rectors	2011 August/2015 Autumn
<i>Uppsala University (UU)</i>	Eva Åkesson (VC) + deputy VC	2011 December
<i>University of Skövde (HIS)</i>	Sigbritt Karlsson (VC)	2012 January
<i>University of Gothenburg (GU)</i>	Pam Fredman (VC)	2012 June
<i>Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)</i>	Lisa Sennerby Forsse (VC) + deputy VC + 3 vice rectors/Peter Högberg (VC) + deputy VC + 2 vice rectors	2012 August/2015 June
<i>Linnæus University (LNU)</i>	Stephen Hwang (VC) + university management	2014 December
<i>Umeå University (UMU)</i>	Lena Gustavsson (VC) + deputy VC	2015 January <sup>23</sup>
<i>Chalmers University of Technology (Chalmers)</i>	Stefan Bengtsson (VC)	2015 August
<i>Karolinska Institutet (KI)</i>	Karin Dahlman-Wright (Acting VC)	2016 February

<sup>21</sup> The VC blog at KTH is named a “weekly letter”, but here classified as a blog.

<sup>22</sup> A blog by Vice-Chancellor Ingegerd Palmér at Mälardalen University existed before Karin Röding’s blog; however, no data could be retrieved about the blog.

<sup>23</sup> This VC/university management blog was sporadically active before the VC joined, with posts by the deputy VC and vice rectors. Therefore, an interview is included, but in this table reported as being initiated as a VC blog with the engagement of the VC.

The blogging activity, in terms of number of total posts by all blogs, increased steadily between 2010 and 2014, with the publishing frequencies (Figure 3) between the blogs widely varying. Four blogs (UU, SU, MIUN, LU) published much more posts than the others (i.e. between 8 and 10 posts per month). The eight blogs that were active during that period published between one and five posts per month. The four blogs that were started later are all in a group with a lower publishing frequency: KI with an average of 3.6 posts per month (18 posts between February and June 2016), Chalmers 3.5 posts per month (38 posts between August 2015 and June 2016), UMU 1.4 posts per month (25 posts between January 2015 and June 2016), and LNU has the lowest rate of 0.9 posts per month (13 posts between December 2014 and February 2016). Notable among the four new blogs is that the two most active blogs are written in the name of the VC, whereas the two blogs with lesser activity are run by several authors.

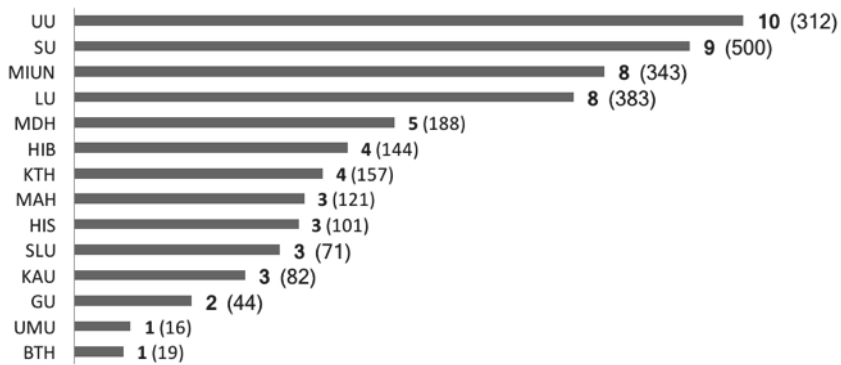


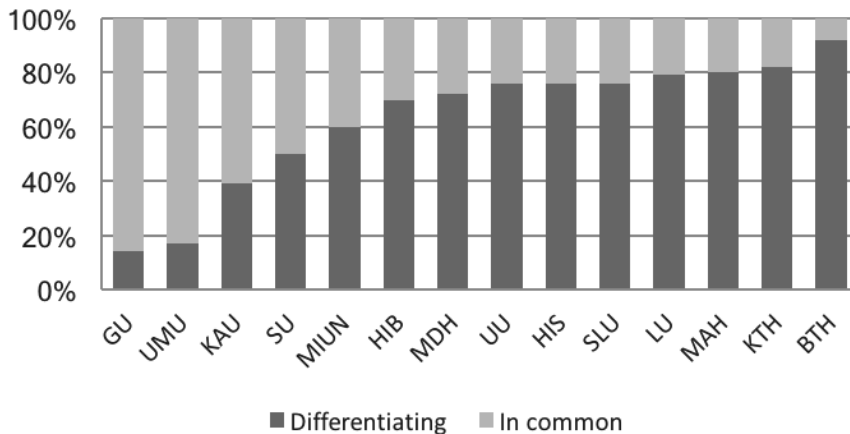
Figure 3. Average published posts per month during the period January 2010 – June 2014 (the numbers in parenthesis indicate the total number of posts during the period).

Vice-Chancellor blogs are not always limited to containing the thoughts and opinions of the VC, but occasionally include those of the deputy VC and the Vice-rectors. Nevertheless, I use the label “Vice-Chancellor blog” for all versions of the blog<sup>24</sup>. Ten of the blogs are run by a Vice-Chancellor, two blogs are shared between the VC and the deputy VC, and three blogs are operated between the VC, the deputy VC, and a number of Vice-rectors (or “the university management”).

<sup>24</sup> Different labels are used to name the blogs, which are here given in their original Swedish: ”rektorsblogg”, “rektors blogg”, “universitetslednings blogg”, and ”ledningsblogg”.

## The Content of the Vice-Chancellor Blogs: The Dominance of Differentiation and Aspects of Uniqueness

The material and analysis of the VC blogs were based on 14 blogs that were active either throughout or during parts of 2011-2012. In all, 1326 posts were included. The aim of the analysis was to determine whether the posts presented unique and differentiating picture of the university or whether the Vice-Chancellor presented opinions and thoughts related to issues common for the whole sector. Thus, the guiding question for the analysis was whether differentiating arguments related to branding and reputation management were central in the blogs, or if content could be identified as part of a process in which the posts were aimed to cover broader implications common to higher education.



*Figure 4.* Distribution between content containing differentiating aspects or aspects of commonality in the Vice-Chancellor blogs in 2011-2012 (a total of 1326 posts).

The aggregated result of the analysis revealed a dominance of differentiating aspects before those with a broader appeal and common issues: about two thirds of the material was coded as differentiating and one third as content associated with sector-wide issues. The findings show that blogs mainly highlight unique aspects of their respective universities: for example, presenting results such as awards, prestige research projects, and their financing and how many students that have applied for their courses and programs. Even though differentiating aspects dominate in the blogs, there are variations (Figure 4). Three VC blogs (GU, UMU, and KAU) favor content dealing with sector issues while addressing their particularities less

often. These three blogs were also less active at the time of the study (Figure 3). The blog at Stockholm University, operated by Kåre Bremer, displayed an even distribution in the contents' alignment, which promoted and presented content on the university's performance while simultaneously containing text that dealt with issues regarding the sector. The other blogs, in contrast, focused on the performance of the individual university. Thus, 10 of the blogs from both universities and university colleges displayed a content that favors their own operations and performances in various ways, 3 blogs favored a content dominated by sector related issues, and 1 blog was balanced. The young/small universities tended to represent differentiating arguments, whereas the old/large universities were more balanced (Table 6).

Table 6. University size and age, and arguments in Vice-Chancellors blogs (based on content in blogs from 2011-2012)

<i>University type</i>	<b>Dominating arguments: differentiating</b>	<b>Dominating arguments: in common</b>	<b>Balanced arguments</b>
<i>Old/large</i>	LU, UU	GU, UMU	SU
<i>Old/small</i>	KTH, SLU		
<i>Young/large</i>	MAH		
<i>Young/small</i>	MIUN, MDH, HIB, HIS, BTH	KAU	

## To Differentiate a University

To supply readers with numbers and results and to point to unique and successful examples of university performance and operations suggest the universities are trying to enhance their reputation and brand. The blogs are pervaded with examples of successful and groundbreaking research projects, record numbers of students applying for their programs, and positions on rankings. The international ranking of universities is one aspect that was often present in the blogs, especially when gaining positions or being on the top of a list. Peter Gudmundson, Vice-Chancellor at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, discussed his university's position on the two rankings Times Higher Education (THE) and the Shanghai Jiao Tong (QS) in a post called "Good Rankings and the Development Plan on Remittance". The first list was especially mentioned as significant and he was happy to recognize the improvements that his university had made.

A few weeks back this year's ranking from Times Higher Education was published, maybe the most relevant ranking list for KTH. Alongside the Shanghai Jiao Tong, the Times Higher Education is the most widespread

internationally ranking list. In the total list of universities in the world, KTH is now ranked as 140, which is a significant improvement in comparison with the rank of 187 from last year. A careful analysis of the indicators (research, citations, teaching, internationalization, external funding) that forms the basis of the ranking shows that KTH is improving in all indicators. Especially gratifying is that we now see an enhancement in the indicator for citations. A relatively heavy weight is put on reputation. Here, KTH has a strong brand. If comparing between purely technical universities, then KTH is among the top 10 in Europe and number 1 among the technical universities in the North. (October 15, 2012)

Rankings as a topic were present in all blogs and the posts often contained passages about the latest ranking directly after they were made official. Another example is taken from the VC blog at Uppsala University, where the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor, Eva Åkesson, shared the news of the university's position in the latest reputation ranking made by THE:

It is great that we, Uppsala University, retain the position as one of the 100 best universities in the world. This comes from a new ranking made by the Times Higher Education – World Reputation Rankings in 2012. 0.5% of the world's universities appear on the top 100 list. Competition is getting tougher. Uppsala University fairs well in the competition, but will always keep working to improve. Continuous quality development and further development of our internationalization are important for the future. Add the strong student influence and active student participation and we will stand strong in the future. We have a great reputation to cherish and nurture. (March 16, 2012)

Additional to the rankings, research and research results are highlighted in the blogs, such as when larger financing is received for new projects. At Lund University, the blog applauded a project for receiving a new large, long-term fund.

The Strategic research foundation decided on three large projects for LTH at Lund University in the areas of electro technique, information technique, and computer science. The funding is about 15 MSEK per year for five years and is connected to the strategic program ELLIIT where we cooperate with Linköping University. A big CONGRATULATION! (February 15, 2011)

Other “success stories” of the VC blog content are when students or alumni of the university are nominated or awarded prizes. The students have either taken part in competitions in their respective areas of study or excelled in their post-studies. For example, Sigbritt Karlsson, the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Skövde, shared the success of some former students:

That our university's students and alumni excel by receiving awards have become a very nice common reoccurrence. The latest successes, among many, is Daniel Kaplan's nomination as one of the 30 most promising people

of the gaming industry that are under 30, and the nomination as Lecturer of the Year 2011 to Erik Fernholm, who studied to Psychology coach with us. A big congratulation. (January 31, 2012)

Besides telling the world about rankings, research, and student successes, the VC blogs retain the focus on the university when sharing thoughts and opinions on organizational developments at the university. The blogs contain comments before and after meetings where the strategic directions of a university were discussed. The Vice-Chancellors shared their opinions on strategic work and work with an aim to the future and where the university is going. For example, at Malmö University, the Vice-Chancellor presented the work that had already been done, where they were now, and what was about to come in a blog post on the university's new strategic work:

The draft for strategy was presented to the university's managers and leaders last Monday. In September, you will all get a first opportunity to acquaint yourselves and discuss the material on workplace meetings at your department. I will later this fall visit all departments to discuss how we are to complete and formulate our new strategic platform. (September 13, 2012)

The VC blogs at Stockholm University stood out in the analysis, delivering a balance between differentiation and common issues in the blog:

Finally, after many turns, courting, and arm-twisting on various actors, the exhibition of the zoning plan for Albano will start today. It is a major step to get the project rolling. The development of Albano is absolutely necessary for the university's future development. [...] Because Stockholm University is Sweden's largest university and one of the country's big research institutions, the future of the university, and thus the development of Albano, is a national matter and an important issue for the future of the Stockholm region. I hope for an active and staunch support from all the relevant authorities. (March 21, 2012)

...with posts addressing sector issues, for example:

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education have released a new report showing that researchers spend 10% of their research time on writing applications. This percent is not surprising, even though the work with formulating new research plans has its value. The problems are several, including resources, especially public resources, that are fragmented among too many financiers and too many calls, and the periods for the grants are too short. (November 24, 2011)

The common issues, where the interest of the sector is put first (and the university takes a back seat) are generally less prevalent in the VC blogs. In the younger and smaller universities, the tendency was to focus on branding, although this could also be found in the older and larger universities. Thus,



the presence of differentiating aspects was present in the distinct types of university though most clearly visible in the content of the younger and smaller universities.

## Using the Vice-Chancellor Blog to Address Issues Common to the Higher Education Sector

The content in the Vice-Chancellor blogs at the University of Gothenburg, Umeå University, and Karlstad University are noteworthy in the Swedish VC blogosphere. These three are also among the blogs with the lowest publishing frequency, with an average of one to three posts per month during the periods when they were active in 2011-2012. One post representing this perspective was published by Vice-Chancellor Åsa Bergenheim in the blog at Karlstad University. The blog approached the issues surrounding the development of academia and where Swedish research was heading. Even though using her university as an example, the post continues to discuss issues relevant for the sector:

Autumn 2012 is important to Swedish research. A new research and innovation political proposition is expected. As a Vice-Chancellor at a university, I do of course have a long wish list on millions for this and that. But central. and if I open my eyes a bit more, is to discuss the conditions for Swedish research with room for both innovation and breadth. [...] The signals to universities and university colleges today are, "We have to raise the level; there is too much bad research produced in this country. Let the excellent researchers do research and leave the teaching to the others. We have to comment on these signals. (June 12, 2012)

In the examples above we can identify the dominance of differentiating arguments in the blogs but there is also attention given to common issues of the status and development of higher education in all the blogs though they are just not as prevalent.

## Reflections on The Role of the Vice-Chancellor Blog

The results of the content analysis stressed what was written in the blogs, but those findings cannot tell us about the underlying reasoning or views on how and why the blogs have their role. Thus, to better understand the role of the Vice-Chancellor blog, 13 representatives at 12 universities with active blogs in spring 2014 were interviewed. The analysis of the material resulted in the identification of a set of underlying characteristics, purposes, and uses of the blog, which are listed below:

- to assist the positioning and the role of the Vice-Chancellor in the university, the local community, the region, and in the sector;
- to influence what the university “stands for”, and contribute to openness and transparency by sharing information and the Vice-Chancellor’s or the university managements’ opinions on internal decisions but also to comments on developments in the sector and society that are related to the university;
- to assist the branding of the university and build a good reputation;
- the blog as a one-way channel and;
- the blog’s free-standing character, with a limited coordination with the university’s overall communication.

### A Channel to Position the Vice-Chancellor (and the University Management)

In the universities with active blogs, blogs have appeared as a communication channel closely related to the role and the leadership of being a Vice-Chancellor. The blogs aim to create and improve the image and understanding of who the person(s) is behind the formal title(s) and the opinions she, he, or they want to express. Because it holds opinions written in the name of the university management and the Vice-Chancellor, who is the general-director of a governmental authority, the final content is presented as always being a product of the author, and hence not written by staff from the communication department or other administrative units. The Vice-Chancellor represents a high official position at a university, and the position is reflected in the perception that its content cannot be written by anyone else than the person(s) that the blog explicitly represents. The forming of the words and their meaning are considered impossible to (re-)produce (and unethical) if not holding the office.

Decisions by the university management or reflections on issues relevant to the university are generally distributed to all employees via digitally available resources. However, when sharing thoughts on the same information in a blog, elaboration of the information is permitted to foster a more personal perspective compared with the more formal format of other documents or emails. For example, at Malmö University, the VC blog was initially used to position the then new Vice-Chancellor Stefan Bengtsson to introduce himself and his vision for the university to the employees. However, the blog also served as an introduction of himself to his new city. This was described as an initial purpose, one that needed to be changed once the goal fulfilled:

It is a way to introduce myself because I knew. It was a way to present my thoughts, [...] Now I feel that it needs a new aim; otherwise, we risk ending up idle. (Bengtsson, MAH)

The Communication director at Uppsala University expressed a similar notion when noting that a large university tends to create larger distances between employees and management:

For an organization like Uppsala University, it means that most (maybe it sounds unfair to the Vice-Chancellor) have no idea of who the Vice-Chancellor of the university is. We have 6800 employees and it is not at all sure that they know who the Vice-Chancellor is. And it really doesn't matter in their everyday work either. The blog is a way to make the management internally visible. Making it easier to follow what they work with and the strategic issues. (Björk, UU)

The conceptions of the blog as a communication channel consist of views to encourage informality and allow the Vice-Chancellor and the university management leeway and flexibility when commenting on various issues. Thus, it conveys a more personal perspective and reflection on the daily work and chores of a Vice-Chancellor office, which functions to make management more approachable. The use of a personal tone, however, is a delicate balance between staying professional and never becoming private. The blog is simultaneously a platform for the Vice-Chancellor and the university to communicate and become more visible. At the University of Skövde, the blog was discussed, planned, and executed in cooperation with the communication department and the Vice-Chancellor. The basic idea was to use the blog to create a platform for both to boost general visibility and credibility.

It is important to justify the university college. It was somewhat invisible. Internally, the university management was invisible and externally the only visibility was through marketing. [...] The blog is a way to construct her [the VC] as a credible person-- as a speech person for academics in Sweden. (Snäll, HIS)

Similar thoughts were expressed at Mälardalen University, where the blog was called a complimentary channel to aid the visibility of the Vice-Chancellor. It is also perceived as a way to retain control and bypass the established media when having opinions that would not pass the gatekeepers of media. This notion is nicely illustrated by Vice-Chancellor Bengtsson at Malmö University:

You have your own channel to convey your opinion. Then, of course, it also depends on who reads the blog. But I think it is as good as any. [...] It is a way to convey your own opinion. It is a channel that you control yourself. You can't control the media for obvious reasons. (Bengtsson, MAH)

## Direction and Openness of a University: Managing Operations and Identity

In addition to making the Vice-Chancellor and the university management more visible, the blogs are also considered tools to impact the direction and identity of a university, to share relevant organizational information directed at employees, and to create a transparent leadership. A core idea here is that a larger number of the employees can take part of management's opinions and work. The blog thus supports and guides employees to understand what the university is about, to be informative and, at the same time, open up a previously closed world. All this creates a better understanding of the work done by university management. This "openness" is realized by sharing information from meetings, daily work, travels, and the reflections that the Vice-Chancellor and management put into words for employees to read and (occasionally) to comment on.

The blogs are most often not directly connected to the planned coordinated work of the communication department. However, the view of its impact on university identity is encountered. Therefore, what the university stands for is a central issue for the communication department and the Vice-Chancellor. The blog is not explicitly used to address the issue of organizational identity. Still, addressing the opinions and thoughts of university management is a means to convey official directions from a senior organizational level. The *one* university ideal becomes visible through the presentation of the blog's content, but is also a way to manage what the university stands for, its vision for the future, and what it represents to the employees.

It is crucial that I convey an idea that I stand for and it is obvious that it should also be the values that are those of Malmö University. We talk about how we want to create a modern university in the sense of being open, multidisciplinary, open to collaboration, and curious about our surrounding environment. (Bengtsson, MAH)

The internal perspective was generally the first idea on how to use the blog, but is also a purpose that is joined with an external aim. The internal and external are conceived as closely related in the sense that the internal coherence is reflected in external perceptions of stakeholders.

The blog is also presented to function as an information channel aimed at employees, where, for example, decisions such as a geographical re-organization and how politics and developments of the higher education sector reflect and affect the university. The blog has been used to inform and reflect on organizational developments at several universities (e.g., at Mid Sweden University where one external campus was proposed to move from its current location to another city). The Communication director at SLU explained the blogs' informational functions as:

...about giving all our co-workers a change to understand and follow events concerning our profile, our external relations, and motives for decisions that we make about our organization. (Zethraeus, SLU)

From the internal perspective, the strongest argument and purpose is reflected in the ideas of the blog's ability to open the managements' work and their opinions towards employees, so that the blog can more easily transfer information to actors at the university. Consequently, the interviewees talked about the openness and transparency as characterizing the blog. At Mälardalen University, addressing re-organization issues is a way to work towards openness, and at the University of Gothenburg, Uppsala University, and Mid Sweden University, the blog is conceived of as a crucial part of making the whole university open up work processes to become transparent. The Mälardalen University blog was, on this issue, described as:

...a way to enhance transparency. To give co-workers, students, and people outside the university a possibility to take part of what she does and where she is. She is not here that often, and as the Vice-Chancellor of an authority, she is often travelling to represent the university. She also comments on what happens and how it relates to the university. It is important for her to show that the university is collaborative. (Andersson Ax, MDH)

The Vice-Chancellor at Borås University stressed that the blog is "his" and that when he writes and reflects on what happens at the university, it is not coordinated with the university management or communication department, but consisting entirely of his own opinions and views.

## Blogging for Reputation and the University Brand

The brand and the aspect of being unique, are emphasized as important motivations for communication in universities, and are bearing ideas for the Vice-Chancellor blog. The external perspective is visible in how the higher education sector, politicians, journalists, students (to a limited degree), and the public are identified as potential targets and readers of the blog posts. The competition argument, including the recruitment of students and employees, and issues of funding and influence in the sector, are centralized. The blog, with content from the university's most senior representative(s), is then regarded as a tool to influence the sector, journalists, and politicians by contributing and sharing opinions and insights into university performance and success, and by commenting on issues common to the sector. The blog is also considered a chance to bypass traditional media outlets (like the daily newspaper) to comment on issues that probably would not have been published in the papers. Using the blog as a new type of channel to present a university and comment on a wide range of issues serves to contribute to the

university's brand. The Communication director at Mid Sweden University put the blog in the middle of his branding work when noting how it represents the essence of the university.

We could probably do a lot more, but it is the Vice-Chancellor's blog, and that is how it works and fits in well with how we work with our brand, and how we want to be. We want to be an open, inviting, and society oriented university, and for those purposes the blog fills its function very well. We could probably do a better job if working with the blog together with the Vice-Chancellor. But he knows what to do on his own - he is a communicative Vice-Chancellor. So, don't touch it if it works. (Strandh, MIUN)

The blogs are used as pro-active tools in an environment that is increasingly becoming competitive, according to the interviewees. "Doing good", as in conducting new and original research and offering qualitative courses and programs for students, is insufficient given the context of higher education. By sharing placings on ranking lists, prizes and awards, new high-status publications, visits by distinguished guests, the number of students applying for the university's courses, and new funding for research projects is viewed as necessary for the survival and success of the university. In this context, the Vice-Chancellor's voice is influential. Furthermore, making the Vice-Chancellor visible in the broader debate and public mind is a further purpose of the blog. If the Vice-Chancellor's role is strengthened locally, nationally, and internationally, the gained influence will reflect positively on the university's brand and reputation. These ideas are visible at all the universities, but more prominent in the smaller and younger universities and university colleges. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Borås pointed to the difficulties of being a smaller university college when competing with established and bigger universities.

We always must show that we exist. I think that if more people hear about us in connection to what we do – interesting research projects and so on – the better when it comes to student's choices and research financing. To be heard, to be seen, and to be where it happens are absolutely necessary. (Brorström, HIB)

Similar notions of difficulties were expressed in the interview at the smaller University of Skövde, where, for example, the "unfair" distribution of resources of the universities were linked to being smaller and less visible.

### The Blog as a One-Way Channel

The VC blog can be characterized as a one-way communication channel, with messages sent from the Vice-Chancellor to a group of largely unidentified readers. Hence, the blogs are information channels, even though

its dialogical possibilities are also recognized and praised in the interviews. However, Vice-Chancellors and communicators acknowledge that the blog is not planned for use as a dialogue platform but as a mouthpiece for the university management. After being asked about the ideas of interactions through the blog, the management communicator at Mälardalen University explained:

It is principally information. Yes, I think it is. Had we chosen another way... no, it is information. (Andersson Ax, MDH)

Still, there are hopes and aspirations for interactions through the blog, but also fears that it could be overwhelming with too much interactivity because it consumes valuable time. Nevertheless, it is prioritized because it is a quick, informal, and controllable channel. The worries of overwhelming comments by readers and the need to reply are, however, not based on actual experience in that blog posts admittedly rarely receive comments.

There are very few comments. It's pretty much a monologue. (Strand, MIUN)

When interviewing Dan Guttke at Karlstad University, he presented an overview of activity for the Karlstad University's Vice-Chancellor blog that revealed that from the start of the blog in November 2011 to the time for the interview in February 2014, there had only been 27 comments posted by the readers.

There are not yet any extensive analyses conducted at the universities on the blogs' readership, reach, or impact. The evaluation of the blog is instead based on talks in university corridors and the occasional use of digital tools for statistical reports. At one university, Google Analytics was used to overview the blog's visitors. When I asked to see the numbers, it was clear that a sizeable portion of the visitors to the blog came from IP-addresses in the USA, which could be relevant to reconsider when the blog is written in Swedish. However, the numbers were used in the count of the blog's readership. The interview at the University of Gothenburg included two communicators, and in our talk, the issues with blog statistics became apparent:

Hansson Schützer: The important thing is maybe not to have a lot of readers, but having the right readers.

Sjövind: Exactly.

Me: Could you find that out?

S: Well, then you... may look at statistics. It is very quantitative. So, to get a deeper insight of the blog's influence you must make something bigger. But that is maybe not the first thing to do, I'd say.

## The Un-Integrated Blog: In the Hands of the Vice-Chancellor

The blog is characterized as a channel that is mainly in the hands of the Vice-Chancellor and university management. The role of the communication department as the coordinator of university communication is therefore challenged in relation to the blog. Thus, the integration into a work for consistent university communication is not part of the communication department's work. Consequently, communication department representatives acknowledge the independence of the blog and the "weak" connection to the university's communication apparatus. The Vice-Chancellors also acknowledge this circumstance. There is agreement on the potential benefits of having an integrated blog in which the alignment along centrally coordinated lines would make the blog work for the enhancement of the university brand. Still, it must be kept in mind that the freedom to express thoughts and opinions without restraint are fundamental to the functioning of a blog and, thus viewed as a basic principle for its existence. The interviews exposed how the ideal of integrated communication is widely shared, as well as how the blogs are not run as a part of the *one* university. The interviews do not give insights into whether the communication department is seeking to increase control and integration, or if the Vice-Chancellor and the university management stand above and outside the communication coordination, but they indicate a separation of control. Andersson Ax of Mälardalen University suggests that there are ideas to interfere and increase control residing at the communication department, but the blog is continuously positioned outside these integration efforts:

We have a student running our Instagram account for a period of time. And that is part of a plan-- there is a frame for it... But the Vice-Chancellor's blog, it floats freely. [...] We all recognize that it is her blog. (Andersson Ax, MDH)

Many of the blogs are written by the Vice-Chancellor or university management, and content in most of them originate from the authors, while ideas for content are occasionally being discussed between authors and communicators before publishing a post. However, even if content is discussed or not, nearly all blog posts are written by the author (VC, deputy VC, or Vice-rector) in whose name the blog is operating. Ghostwritten blogs are unwanted, and even impossible, because of the weight and importance of the Vice-Chancellor's words. The Stockholm University Vice-Chancellor explains her view on the importance of writing the blog posts herself:



For me, this is having a personal voice and that is also why it is unthinkable to have someone else writing my posts, because it is, so to speak, my voice. It would be like if someone dubbed me. (Söderbergh Widding, SU)

Vice-Chancellor Gudmundson of KTH similarly asserted that he is the only source for the content of the blog. Similar comments were expressed by the other Vice-Chancellors in the interviews, which underlines their independence when writing for the blogs. The blogs are “owned” by the VCs, i.e. it is their personal channel and therefore it affects how the communication departments approach the channels. The personal connection and dependence of the blog and its author(s) and the role of the communication department were illustrated in the interview at Lund University:

She [deputy VC] was very active. And Per [VC] was a bit unwilling, so to speak. The activity massively plunged when she quit. (Andersson, LU)

The role of the communication department and communicators working with the blog is then to be a supporting, and sometimes *initiating*, function for the blog. They also play an initial role when setting up the blogs and provide technical guidance to the VCs when they start blogging. Many of the blogs were first conceived when a university changed Vice-Chancellor, and because of discussions between the university’s communicators and the Vice-Chancellor. The blog at Karlstad University was initiated after both the VC and the management communicator showed mutual interest in the idea of starting a blog:

We started the Vice-Chancellor blog in November 2011 when Åsa Bergenheim became our Vice-Chancellor. We had discussed it with her and she wanted to blog. [...] My role has been as a communication support. (Guttke, KAU)

Some blogs, however, seem to require more encouragement from the communication department. From the interviews, this seemed to be associated with less engagement from the Vice-Chancellor and university management. For example, the blog at Karlstad University was shared between four authors from university management, had a low publishing frequency, and was eventually cancelled in 2015. Also, the blogging activity at Lund University varied, with the communicators more involved with some authors in the university management while others functioned independently. At Uppsala University, the Communication director acknowledged that if she thought the blog got too quiet during some period, then she would talk to the VCs about keeping continuity and would juggle some ideas for new posts.

Because a university's communication is governed and regulated by governing documents such as *vision*, *communication policy*, *strategies*, and *plans*, the blog is not directly or explicitly linked to such works and the coordination aspects they represent. It is stated that a few universities have a short document on *how* to write (e.g., not writing too long texts). The University of Gothenburg presented a brief document with blogging guidelines and at Malmö University the Vice-Chancellor claimed he was trying to follow "the big communication document". Nevertheless, the general coordination effort seems to stay at an informal discussion between the Vice-Chancellors and the communication department on the blog's character and function. However, at most universities there are no written blog guidelines. The interview with the Communication director of the University of Skövde illustrates why there is a general lack of regulations for the blog with respect to the Vice-Chancellor's position:

It is completely up to her [the VC]. She is our principal director and she decides what is important for the university. (Snäll, HIS)

The personal engagement and interest of the Vice-Chancellor is portrayed as crucial for a blog. However, time is always an issue with regards to a blog. If the blog is seen as fun, modern, and useful to the purposes of a VC's role and work, then it is regarded as an effective communication channel for the university management's activities. These conditions necessarily reside with the authors since no communication department could "force" commitment. Hence, the use of the blog is regarded as dependent on the personal interests of the VCs. Vice-Chancellor Björn Brorström of the University of Borås describes his reasons for blogging:

Brorström: I believe there are three things that coincide as to why I am doing this. First, I am convinced it is worth it. That is why I value it. I have this principle of publishing regularly.

Me: So, they [the communication department] don't need to push you...?

B: Well, when you work out and want to run every Saturday and Sunday, and the weather is bad, then it starts. Now, I like jogging. But you see, I want to put that pressure on myself, in some meaning. And I believe it's worth it. And I also actually think it is fun; it is fun to write. [...] I prioritize it.

## Chapter Summary

A Vice-Chancellor blog is present in less than half of the Swedish universities, but where it is present, it has a strong position (if understood from a management perspective). The content and perceptions of the Vice-

Chancellor blog in Swedish universities were analyzed to provide a directed study of a social media channel to understand its role in relation to characteristics of strategic communication. The blog content and interviews suggest that the blogs serve as a tool to inform internal and external stakeholders on the activities and performance of the university and to transmit the opinions of the university leadership. The blog does not reflect the concept of integration (of organizational communication), but in the hands of the Vice-Chancellor, it retains a position of being independently operated outside of coordinated communication efforts. However, the blog does reflect concepts such as branding and reputation, and it addresses the issue of *one* university, as it is proclaimed to share and promote university values and what the university stands for while also functioning as an information channel for decisions that impacts the university. The findings reflect a managerial perspective on how to work with communication (e.g., top-down, control), but it also shows how conventional assumptions of strategic communication are challenged (e.g., the un-integrated blog). The blog is balancing expectations of strategic communication (centering on purposes serving Vice-Chancellor and university identity, reputation, and brand) while simultaneously swirling in a routine where the established “rules” and norms are confronted and rejected (control and coordination). An aspect here is the position of the Vice-Chancellors and whether the independent control of the blogs could be interpreted as centralized control or not. What the findings show is that the blogs are operating outside of coordinated communication work at the universities.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 contain findings to mainly answer research question one and the presence of strategic communication assumptions in the universities. However, the study of Vice-Chancellor blogs also shows translations of the strategic communication recipe. The following and final empirical chapter (Chapter 7) relates to the findings of the present concepts of communication and the translations of social media and Vice-Chancellors blogs, and elaborates on the study through more extensive fieldwork.



## 7. The Adoption and Uses of Social Media in Two Universities

THE COMMUNICATION WORK at CU will be professionally conducted. This means that work departs from a clearly defined process containing analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation. The goal is a coordinated and resource-efficient communication work within the whole university. [...] CU should actively participate on social media. Through these media, we are to communicate and build relations with students, the public, and other actors in the surrounding society.<sup>25</sup>

The roles of social media are translated in relation to the characteristics of strategic communication in Andromeda University and Centaurus University is the focus of this chapter. In the above excerpt from CU's communication policy instructions of how communication and social media are to be handled and for what goals they are to be adopted are defined. Similarly, who is working with social media, how they are organized and dealt with on an everyday basis, and what the channels are meant to achieve are focused in this chapter.

Strategic communication provides recipes and informs communicators on all organizational levels on how to work with social media. However, how the recipes are received, interpreted, and given meaning in the practices of social media varies across the universities. The chapter goes beyond a managerial perspective on communication by addressing the experiences, intentions, possibilities, and work conducted by communicators on all organizational levels. The findings reveal some inconsistencies and contradictions between the uses of social media and the assumptions of strategic communication. This illustrates a more complex and contrasting view of strategic communication than suggested in a conventional perspective. The ethnographical approach of the study reveals how the recipe of strategic communication is interpreted, negotiated, and given localized meanings inside various university contexts and by the employees working there.

I initially identified and used official university social media accounts that represent the university as points of departure (see Table 3 in Chapter 4 for an overview). The people (and texts that in different ways were related to

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<sup>25</sup> Excerpt from the communication policy of Centaurus University

these accounts were also what was centralized in the study. At AU, 11 “central” accounts located at the department were identified while 14 “non-central” accounts were included and shadowed in the study. At AU, this meant all active social media accounts officially representing the university, or parts of the university, were included. CU is a bigger university, including 17 central and with selected 12 non-central accounts. Owing to the size of CU, all central accounts could be included, but a limitation was made to shadow accounts of faculties and departments, including active accounts at three faculties and three departments.

The fieldwork that this chapter is based on is developed in relation to the findings of the previous empirical chapters, including the *purposes of communication*, *understandings of the nature of communication*, and the *organizing of everyday communication work*. However, the structure of this chapter is developed and structured on the fieldwork, and the analysis was performed in accordance with Scott’s (2003; 2014) notion of *institutional carriers* to approach, identify, and study the strategic communication recipe. The sections of the chapters are constructed in relation to the institutional carriers, but also in relation to how the analysis and findings emerged during the fieldwork:

- relations and responsibilities (relational systems);
- social media organizing and daily work (routines);
- purposes of social media (symbolical systems), and;
- artifacts.

My first meeting with the field was at AU’s communication department in mid-March 2014. For three months, I *shadowed* social media with a base at the communication department, but also studied the university management and active social media accounts at the different departments of AU. My fieldwork continued at AU with several follow-up interviews in autumn 2014, continuing in spring 2015 at CU, where I spent a further three months.

## Relations and Responsibilities of Social Media (Relational Systems)

The coordination and overview of communication and social media are addressed in the two universities by assigning an overarching responsibility to the communication department, and particularly to the *social media specialists* (Maja, AU, and Sandra, CU). This responsibility consists of two aspects: 1) an operational responsibility for the accounts representing the university and 2) the coordination of all official social media accounts and activities around the university. The responsibilities are presented and

defined in the communication policy and strategy where the role of the communication departments and their assignment are made explicit. A communication department's mission is to represent the university, coordinate and control communication, and guide and support social media users across the university so communication can be as efficient as possible within the framework of *one* university. Such strategy supports the goals of the university. This view is illustrated in an excerpt from CU's communication policy (however, the document is called "communication strategy" because the communication policy and strategy are merged into one document):

The communication strategy should contribute to CU to achieve the overall objectives of Vision 2020. At the same time, it should contribute to a communication that allows for the university to be perceived as a coherent organization with a distinct sender.

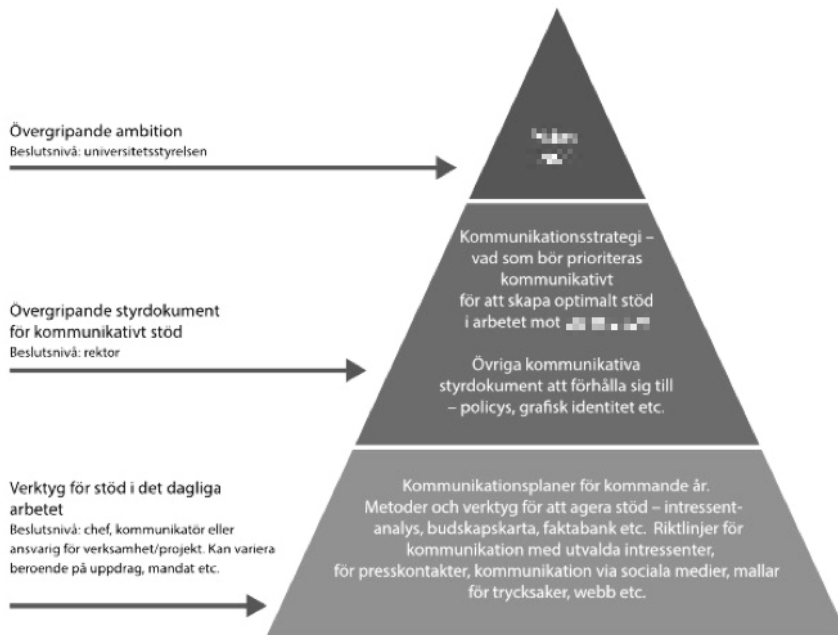


Figure 5. Communication hierarchy as presented in the communication strategy of Centaurus University. Social media are presented as part of the base, under the title "Tools to support daily work". The image has been edited for anonymization.

Social media are integrated into and subordinated to overarching frame of communication at the university, where the governing documents, such as communication policy, communication strategy, and Vision, control and guide its adoption and use.

At CU, the position of social media as tools was visualized as a “hierarchical pyramid” in their communication strategy (Figure 5). The idea of a coherent university is illustrated in the document as communication to be managed and aligned in accordance with centrally produced visions and goals. Consequently, social media are understood as hierarchically subordinate to superior communication strategies and with both a strategical and operational responsibility located at the communication department. At AU, the communication policy was signed and approved by the university board, while the Vice-Chancellor Robin signed the one at CU. Subordinate documents, such as strategies and plans, are produced at the communication departments or at faculties and departments. However, although the overarching responsibility of communication (and hence social media) rests with the communication departments, there is also a balance between central and local decision making. The communication policies at both universities contain descriptions of how each employee has a responsibility but also a possibility (or “right”) to communicate, and how employees in managerial roles have responsibilities to their organizational units. Hence, the everyday responsibilities of the communication department include the daily management of the central university accounts (e.g., “@university”), and to support and align local accounts. The Communication director at CU prescribed a supportive and guiding role of the CD for the local accounts:

The responsibility is very much out there. I see our job as one of creating the framework to give them the right possibilities. Here are our messages; here is our base material. We can write about you here and there. Then they go where they want to and are the ones in charge. That’s how I think. (Kerstin, CU)

However, even with the shared responsibilities, at the center of the universities social media are the social media specialists, who are directly or indirectly involved in most activities related to social media.

## The Social Media Specialists

When I arrived at AU in March 2014, the fieldwork was initiated at the communication department. I quickly identified how the management of the university’s official social media accounts and a governing function of activities in other accounts throughout the university emanated from there. With the start from an outlook of the accounts, I identified one person, Maja, as central to the university’s social media activities, being responsible for all aspects of the university’s social media. Maja, however, did not have an official title of “social media communicator”, but was informally assigned the task, which had emerged over time, along with her main employment in marketing and student recruitment. Maja said her role materialized because



of a personal interest. She also felt that social media could provide new, modern, and suitable channels for the university's communication. She first initiated and used social media in 2009 as part of a "University Day", which was aimed at recruiting new students. Since then, she has had the role of operating and governing the university's social media and its further development.

We started working with social media back in 2009. I developed some initial guidelines together with the Communication director at the time. I sort of grabbed a hold of it in relation to the "University Days" and since then I have developed it further. (Maja, AU)

Maja has two "stand-ins" (Carolina and Alma), also acting as everyday discussants and replacements for Maja if she is unable to attend work. However, they do not work daily with social media. A comparable situation was found at CU, where one person (Sandra) was regarded as the communicator responsible for social media (she was also referred to as their "social media guru"). She worked closely with a group of two communicators (Eva and Ella), who shared the operating responsibilities of the central social media accounts. At CU, the social media specialists were also working with student recruitment, and shared their work of operating and overseeing the university's social media. The two work assignments (social media and student relations and recruitment) coordinate in that social media are regarded as appropriate tools and channels for building relations with students and in student recruitment.

The role of being responsible for the university's social media is, however, contested by the social media specialists themselves. They recognize a problem in the limited possibility of assigning responsibility to one person (though, supported by a small number of colleagues) to coordinate social media in large organizations. At AU, Maja questioned the limited time she was accorded to work with the overall responsibility of all social media. However, spending about 20% of her work hours on social media (her own estimate), she announced that she would happily set aside more time if she were only assigned more hours. Unlike Sandra, Maja did not question the possibility to manage all the university's accounts, as the size of the university made it "manageable", unlike the bigger CU where more accounts are active. The issue was especially visible at CU and in Sandra's role. At the time of the study, Sandra had started to re-negotiate her responsibility, pointing out the strain that incurs on one person being responsible for a university's social media presence while also having her official work assignment with the student recruitment group<sup>26</sup> (however, a responsibility she doubted would be possible to uphold even with fulltime

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<sup>26</sup> The student recruitment group is located at the communication department.

work). Sandra described her problematic situation and role as simultaneously undefined and too broad:

S: I have notified my superiors that I do not have enough time for social media and the expectations it puts on me. I cannot do it in an effective way. And this, loose title, “responsible for social media” ...

Me: ...for all?

S: Yes, exactly! And I feel that – no, I can’t have that on my shoulders. Because I *can’t* develop the whole university’s social media presence – it’s not doable. I am hesitant to this role even existing. It is impossible to be good at all social media channels that exist ...to know how to work most efficiently with all target groups and all the university’s goals.

Additional to the feeling of having insufficient time, the social media specialists operated social media relative to their own experiences and ambitions and less in line with a coordinated framework. They had no extensive involvement from their senior managers, except for the communication strategist at AU, who partly joined the work performed by Maja but expressed their independence as a way to be creative with their social media work. If in doubt on how to reply in social media then she would consult the Communication director.

### **The Role of Students: Ambassadors for the University**

Students filled important roles in the operation of social media. At both universities, students were recruited to operate different accounts, although they were mainly involved in the use of Instagram and to a lesser extent with Facebook and student blogs. As the introduction to the dissertation illustrated, Instagram has a unique role in the universities when it comes to engaging students. Both AU and CU use students as “curators” on their official Instagram accounts. AU used a *one student per week* concept, while CU had two students (one Swedish and one international) always active during a longer period. The introductory text at AU’s Instagram account announces the student concept, stating “AU’s Instagram account. Every week a new student will present his or her life as a student. Responsible for the account is the communication department” (Figure 6). This can be understood as Maja having an overall responsibility for the account with the students providing its content.

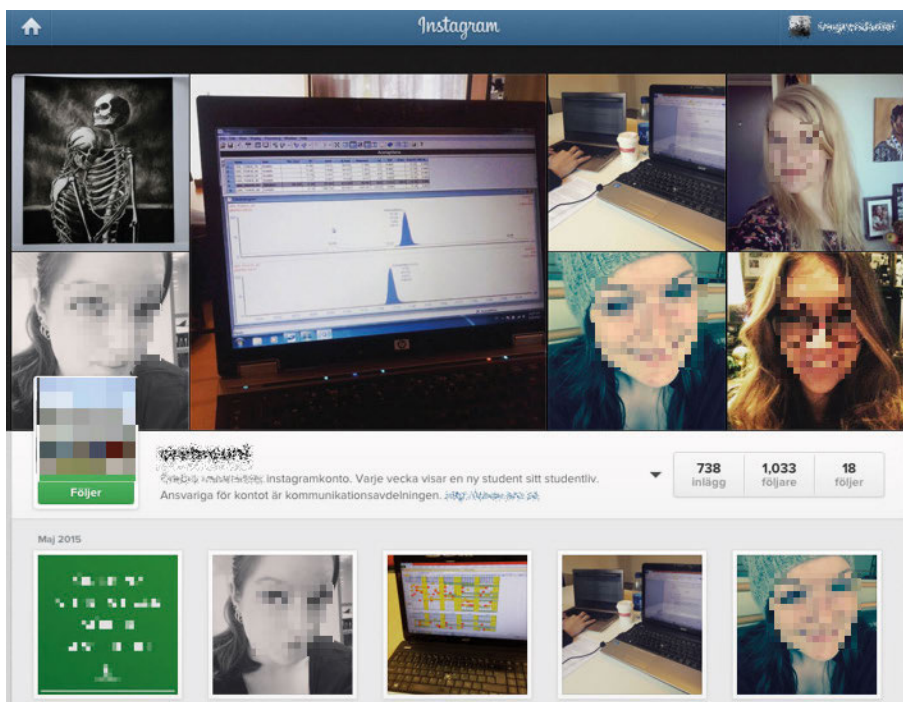


Figure 6. Screenshot of AU’s Instagram account, February 2015. Picture is edited for anonymization.

The Instagram account at CU is overseen by Sandra though it is operated by two students (Pia and Ondrej). This is less obvious because the introductory text only presents the account as CU’s official (Figure 7). One of the CU Instagram students (Pia) works with the university’s Instagram, but also has a large part in the operation of the university’s Swedish Facebook page (also one in English that Eva operates). Pia is hired for the hours she works with Facebook, which makes her an official communicator at the university. Pia met with Sandra about once a month to plan various Facebook activities, but also met to stay contact “when needed”.

I attend meetings where we plan and evaluate Instagram and Facebook. I am both a student and a communicator, but more of a student on Instagram. [...] The university needed extra help because of sick-leaves, so I help them a few hours every week on Facebook as well. There I have more of a communicator role and I post about lectures, applications, etc. On Facebook, I also answer questions if I can; otherwise, I forward them to someone who knows. (Pia, CU)

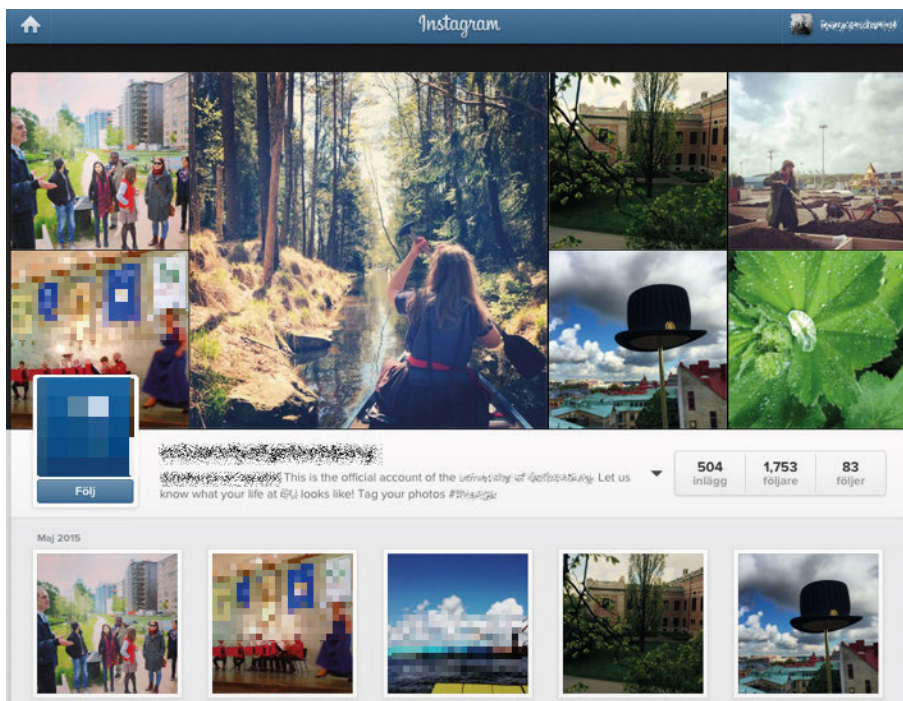


Figure 7. Screenshot of Centaurus University's Instagram account, February 2015. Picture is edited for anonymization.

Pia also described her role as operator of Centaurus University's Facebook account.

The university needed help when they had some cases of sick leave. I helped them a few hours every week. That was purely in the role of a communicator. I present information about open lectures at the university, how to apply to programs and courses, about fun and interesting research, and those sorts of things. (Pia, CU)

Maja recruited students she knew previously from the Instagram account. The students had been working as student ambassadors, accompanying Maja to student fairs and other recruitment campaigns. Thus, she had a personal relation with them, she planned to expand the recruitment process by using nominations for new Instagrammers (this was not implemented at the time of the present study). At CU, Sandra explained that the students writing on student blogs or active on Facebook and Instagram signed contracts that included a set of rules guiding their activities. Sandra said the students need to have a degree of freedom to post within this framework, which meant no proofreading of any posts before being published by the students.

Of course, they can't trash talk their teachers. But we have said that we cannot interrupt by editing or telling them what to write, even if they write "this lecture was boring". It means all lectures must be fun. Then, the authenticity disappears. We do not want that control. [...] Authenticity is what we are looking for. Maybe we have been lucky, but we haven't experienced any problems. The only thing we have done was to talk about limits, to be personal but not private. We want them to be themselves but that it is also about Centaurus University. (Sandra, AU)

## University Management's Roles

AU recruited a communication strategist (Emma) to work directly with the Vice-Chancellor (Ingo) at the time of the study. She entered her work role with clear ideas of how the university was to work with communication. She also quickly developed a picture on the state of social media, including the role of Maja.

I want more activity on social media. Today, we just have Maja working about 20% and she doesn't really have the time as it is. I want it to become more "alive". She tweets pictures of trees and I want something different. I want a better integration in which social media is a natural part of the whole university's communication. Her tweeting represents the whole university. (Emma, AU)

Emma acted as a bridge between university management and the communication department, carrying the key notion of coherence and coordination to her work. She also worked closely with, and shared some of the work Maja was doing with social media, especially Twitter.

Although there was an imparted responsibility to the social media specialists, communication was hierarchical and top-down in the sense that the university management, led by the Vice-Chancellor, made the final decisions regarding the direction of the university's communication and thus ultimately responsible for communication and social media. At AU, the Vice-Chancellor regarded his role as one of having a necessary final say in content and format of communication to keep communication coordinated and not stray from a consistent appearance. However, he did not want to interfere with the daily operations of communication but had a connection to the Communication director and the newly recruited communication strategist to retain an overview. Emma viewed her role as an advisor to the Vice-Chancellor and the university, but also with responsibility to address the university's branding issues.

My task is to make sure that both internal and external communication is consistent. It is important to coordinate communication and the organization, both for the organization itself and for our reputation and brand. (Emma, AU)

Emma was not stationed at the CD, but worked directly with university management, and closely with the Vice-Chancellor. However, she quickly developed a relationship with the CD to collaborate on a wide set of issues, and especially with Maja to coordinate and plan the university's social media presence more efficiently. For example, when Emma was hired, she and Maja developed a joint responsibility of the university's Twitter account, where Emma was to be more strategic, posting content related to managing the university's image and brand. Maja, on the other hand, held an administrative role overseeing the account, answering questions, and posting university news.

Emma may write things that I cannot, her being more strategic. She sits closer to the Vice-Chancellor and has a different role. It is a major gain that we tweet together. I tweet about regular news and Emma has more weight. For example, Emma posted a link on different voices before the EU election that I wouldn't dare do. I could maybe have informed on the possibility that voting was possible at the university. Emma can be more daring than me as she is a communication strategist and she sits closer to the Vice-Chancellor. (Maja, AU)

However, because social media were increasingly regarded as *communication channels like others*, their actual operation was often not directly connected to the Vice-Chancellor's work with communication (except for VC blogging). AU had all formal social media communication located either at the CD or at the departments. In contrast, CU had an active Vice-Chancellor blog and the University director was active on both Instagram and Twitter. Anders, the University director at CU, was open to elaborate social media work at the university:

There are ideas and a powerful desire to do something more. But it also falls back on being a government authority and that is associated with a certain way of communicating. One might not dare to break out of that. Then, it is also the Vice-Chancellor who she does not want to push the boundaries. And you should respect that, as she is the chief of the whole organization. But there are differences... For example, if I remember correctly, when Eva Åkesson became the Vice-Chancellor at Uppsala University, she was very active on social media. But then later she became less active. Maybe she got some sort of backlash. [...] Maybe the Vice-Chancellors are of another generation. The question is what happens with the next generation. (Anders, CU)

The Communication directors are located at the communication departments, but also work closely with the university management. However, they are not working closely with social media, but have a more overarching role in decision-making processes. Development or daily operations of social media

are not part of the Communication director's responsibilities, but rely in the professionalism of their employees.

## The Local Responsibilities

The social media accounts representing faculties or departments, or employees outside the communication department are multifaceted and diverse, including study counselors with Facebook accounts and Twitter accounts representing faculties and departments. The activities are locally regarded as independent from direct influence and control of the communication department and university management, but there is a recognition of potential problems if the accounts fail to follow the central guidelines for social media.

The departments' freedom to operate should be allowed. But there are some accounts that are inactive. They think it takes a lot of time. And that is what I mean. If they don't have a clear idea or time, then maybe they should not have a social media account. (Maja, AU)

A similar view is reflected by Sandra when she notes CU is decentralized. The freedom of employees is considered important, especially when using social media for communication with stakeholders. But, freedom and independence is discussed together with being *one* university, and illustrated in CU as relation between *mother* and (strong) *daughters*. Maja returns to this issue throughout the period of the fieldwork, and juggles the problem of letting local communication initiatives on social media be independent but also aligning to a coordinated frame for communication. The local account holders agree on the perspective that they are independent and free to communicate on social media and only having occasional contacts with the communication department or the social media specialists. Monica, head of communication at one of the faculties at CU stressed the importance of independence and the possibility of building a strong local brand, using Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs as she saw fit – reflecting the *mother and daughter* relation, but putting emphasis on the independence of the daughter. At AU's School of Business, an administrator had started and oversaw the department's Facebook account. She acknowledged having a working relation with Maja and the communication department, but emphasized her independent communication work. She further pointed out that the independence is important so not to get lost in the overarching communication by the university that only communicates the university as a whole and not the specific parts. Hence, at the School of Business, the administrator oversaw planning and operating the department's social media after receiving a go-ahead from the head of the department, who also encouraged the work. Minna, a teacher from the School of Music,

Theatre, and Art at AU, considered herself independent when working with the department's Facebook account for summer courses, but at the same felt that her department's communication was largely uncoordinated with the university's central activities and coordination as they had no working relation.

For the Facebook page, I did not have any contact with the communication department; rather, it was the head of the department that gave me the go-ahead. It generally feels like we are on our own in a little bubble out here, not connected to the university. I have not looked at the central guidelines for communication and social media and no one has contacted me about it. I re-made the logo a bit in Photoshop and I don't know if it is ok, but have it anyway. I haven't really thought about whether the central university could support me and share my pages. (Minna, AU)

The local account holders do, however, recognize a problem in that they are too independent, that there is limited active coordination of communication, and that it leaves them feeling unconnected, rather than being coordinated and cohering to a common idea and work. For example, Lisa, student counselor of the AU School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, requested improved coordination efforts by the communication department. Similarly, Pernilla of the Department for External Relations questioned the relevance and impact of the communication department's coordination work and felt that her social media presence could benefit from improved coordination:

I encountered Maja last spring about social media. I post links from our webpage on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. But if coordination was better, we wouldn't, for example, risk posting duplications. (Pernilla, AU)

## Everyday Work and Social Media (Routines)

The *shadowing* of social media took place at various parts of the universities, but the communication departments functioned as a central and base for further exploration. Hence, the fieldwork was initiated at the communication departments but branched out to the local accounts (mostly by interviewing the local communicators). As shown above, the main responsibility of a university's social media work is in the hands of the social media specialists. At AU, the active official social media accounts were monitored and operated by Maja. At CU, Sandra (together with two colleagues) had the main responsibility for social media-related work. Differences between AU and CU include the concentration of responsibilities and work activities. At AU, one person is responsible and operates the central accounts; at CU, responsibility and operation are divided between the "guru", her close



colleagues, the press secretaries, and a communicator working with alumni relations. At AU, Maja is the sole social media specialist who is engaged in the ongoing development and content production of the central accounts. In addition, she conducts the monitoring, and coordination at AU as a whole. Sandra and her two closest colleagues oversee and coordinate CU's official accounts, but others at the communication department, including students, are more active in the creation and publishing of content on a daily basis. For example, CU's Twitter account is operated daily by the press officers, occasionally consulting Sandra, and the Instagram account representing the university is led by two students, with irregular posts by Sandra on university-related matters.

## At the Communication Department

This section presents how the accounts that represent the universities as a whole are engaged and operated in daily contexts.

### **Doing Social Media at the Andromeda University Communication Department**

Maja manages all accounts according to a daily routine consisting of three checks (morning, lunch, afternoon). She adopted this approach after receiving feedback from a course on social media where this type of regularity was recommended, reinforcing a previous and similar idea she had nurtured. Hence, when arriving to work in the mornings, Maja performs an overview of activities in the accounts for which she is responsible.

Maja logs into Lissly, an intelligence surveillance tool that the university pays to use, to overview Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Flashback, and the forum Familjeliv. She briefly reads all the texts, paying close attention if a post is perceived as critical or positive to different activities connected to the university. She tells me that this procedure is good for following "debates" pertaining to AU. (Fieldnotes, AU)

The procedure is a way for Maja to identify events and activities relating to the university, and a material for her to analyze whether they contain potential problems or unwanted attention (e.g., negative comments on a university activity that has gone viral), or if there are comments or posts that are in different ways helpful or positive for the university (e.g., if she finds a news article commenting on research results). She uses Lissly to monitor and overview social media, but also visits the individual accounts to obtain a detailed overview and to post content or make comments on other posts. Lissly provides Maja with an aggregated overview based on a set of keywords and hashtags (#) that Maja had identified as relevant for her and the university. All accounts are checked in a similar fashion three times

daily. However, she does not restrict her activities to those three times per day, but is active when that is required.

The daily work also consists of forwarding information, questions, and answers (i.e. acting as a middle hand) that she encounters via Lissly or when scanning the accounts. An example is when Maja encountered a post of a new book written by a former university student containing a chapter on sexual abuse, which seemingly had nothing to do with the university. However, the author of the book had at the time of the abuse been a student at the university. She decided that this was relevant information to share.

Today, one thing stood out when I performed the morning routine. It was a former student writing an autobiographical book. The university is mentioned in the context of sexual abuse. This, however, happened when she was younger. I will notify Maria and the department where she studied in case there are questions coming in. (Maja, AU)

Social media content, however, is not only responded to as valuable information for the university, but when questions are posted by students or other stakeholder, Maja tries to answer these questions herself, or delegating the task to someone else. Questions and issues range from students experiencing exam rooms to be too warm, to deadlines for program applications. An example of Maja using her colleagues to answer a question concerned live streaming of lectures.

Maja writes an e-mail to the “web group” based on a question from a student that was posted on Facebook. The student is “home sick with a 40-degree fever” and would like the lecture to be streamed because “that is what they do at other universities”. Alma from the web group replies to Maja that they do not have that service, but that they are working on a project to allow streaming. Maja reasons with herself that she will post an objective answer describing the situation, and that they are working on it, but that there is no such opportunity now. (Fieldnotes, AU)

During the fieldwork at AU, the social media activities were a daily engagement for Maja. However, Facebook is the platform demanding most of her time, although most of the content is produced by students and alumni. Among the social media accounts, this is the one Maja monitors and administrates most actively. The group has “rules” posted on the page for all participants to read, but she is constantly monitoring the group and erases posts that market products or events, or if containing bad language or inappropriate content.

Beside the Facebook group, Maja publishes links to university news on AU’s official Facebook page. She visits the university’s official homepage to retrieve news that the research communicators or the press officer has published, as well as any posts that are linked to these articles on Facebook and Twitter.

Maja maintains a watchful eye on the social media activities, even on days when she is not at work. When she cannot attend the accounts, Alma and Carolina assume responsibility and monitor and operate the accounts. Carolina and Alma are also acting as discussants with Maja on social media issues though other employees at the department or affiliated to other central administration and student ambassadors support Maja. The stand-ins are less active than Maja when assuming the responsibility.

I answer some posts on social media, but mostly I forward questions and sometimes I might need to address controversial or heated discussions. There are guidelines for this in the group and which I follow. I mostly work on Facebook and less with Twitter that is mostly about news. (Carolina, AU)

Beside Maja, the stand-ins and other employees at the communication department, including the communication strategist Emma, became increasingly involved in the social media work. Even though Maja and the Communication director had ideas on how to make Emma active on Instagram, these were soon dropped in favor of Emma being active on Twitter. Emma regarded Twitter as professional, while Facebook is a more private platform. She therefore likes the idea of tweeting for the university. Because she was positioned closer to university management and the Vice-Chancellor, she would serve as AU's "strategic" voice on the official Twitter account while Maja was to function as administrator. The initiative, however, soon became problematic as Emma was both restrained by time and faced technical issues. During spring, they try to meet once a week to discuss what is going on and what to post on Twitter. However, Maja soon took greater responsibility with Emma suggesting occasional postings to Maja rather than being as active as initially planned.

Emma: I have a lot to do right now and the Vice-Chancellor is working hard. It would be good if you [Maja] can keep it afloat.

Maja: Ok, so I might suggest a post for Twitter to you?

E: Yes. And if I, for example, receive a news item and can't post it, then I can forward it to you and you post it.

M: Yes, then we get some pro-active substance.

From this brief conversation, one can see that Maja is mainly in charge of all official social media operations, operating largely independent and according to her own experience and ideas, but with occasional support from Emma and inputs from her position with university management. Based on the Twitter case, Maja had and retained the central voice of the accounts, but intermittently there was the stronger impact of Emma in her role as the

university's communication strategist. Emma's position gave her power to push a strategic agenda while Maja dealt with "informational" tasks.

### **Doing Social Media at the Centaurus University Communication Department**

At CU, the central accounts were shared and operated by communicators with different assignments. The communicators most often had the social media accounts "running in the background" to answer questions or read notifications, but also working along a content planning strategy. Sandra, the social media guru, worked very little with content, but rather retained an overview of activities, and held a supportive role with regards to all social media activities. However, although not working daily with the channel, she did have responsibility for their English Twitter account, which she shared with the press secretaries<sup>27</sup>. Sandra's daily work was often to support central and local accounts, to keep an overview, and to plan for central accounts.

Me: So, you follow what is posted in your channels?

Sandra: Yes, we do. We watch and follow the flows. Absolutely. And then we have Pia, who has helped us for a while. We have planning meetings with her.

Me: For Facebook and Instagram?

S: Yes, we met about once a month to follow up and plan what is important for the coming month. It is a step in making the content relevant in these channels.

Even though Sandra, together with her colleagues Eva and Ella, retained an overriding strategic responsibility for several of the channels, the daily operations were done by students. Pia was a student with a more extensive work routine, being involved in both Facebook and Instagram. The planning of her work is done in regular meetings with Sandra and Eva, or through email if considered necessary by the latter two. Other students are also generating content on Instagram (an international student, Ondrej, is sharing the account with Pia), and student blogs. There were several active blogs written in three languages: Swedish, English, and Chinese. The university was also active on Chinese social media, having recruited alumni in China to operate accounts on Renren, Weibo, and Youku (similar to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). The approach is to allow the students a possibility to be personal, but also act in relation to guidelines that they are provided, here illustrated by Eva:

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<sup>27</sup> This group, consisting of three employees, went by the name "pressisar" (in English approximately "the pressies") at the communication department.

We are an authority, but on social media it is a balance between facts and feelings. Communication easily turns anxious and dry ...I think that we should live a little! (Eva, CU)

From the communication department, Märta, who works at the alumni group, operates a LinkedIn group, where she had the ambition to share one piece of news every day. Sandra is not engaged with Linked, but interested in it from an employer branding perspective; for Sandra, it has lower priority because of a lack of time. Thus, LinkedIn was in the hands of the alumni coordinators, accepting former students into the group, and posting articles from the university or links with “interesting content” for the alumni.

A note should also be made about the university’s use of YouTube. The university has an active channel but during the time of the study Sandra had initiated a work to “develop their presence” because a current lack of coordinated work and a clear idea. For this, consultants were brought in to support Sandra, namely, two other communicators from the communication department and a unit of the university that focused on technical solutions and film production. At the meeting with the consultants, the current use was discussed as were aims of the university. It was decided that the consultants would help clarify and produce guidelines for CU to adopt. In a conversation between Sandra and Eva, they acknowledge that consultants are needed because of their lack of knowledge about the social media in question.

We don’t know much about YouTube. So, we are bringing in this social media guru to help develop it. (Fieldnotes, CU)

The external “guru” consultant, Tania, was later interviewed. In addition to confirming her knowledge on the area lacking by the university communicators, she also pointed to a need for bringing in an external perspective that could help counteract engrained ways of thinking about and performing communication at the university.

The common thing is to bring in consultants to aid with strategy work. You need an outsider’s thinking. Inside, you are very much indoctrinated with old habits and beliefs about what you think you should do. [...] For example, there is often a belief that the web is the “hub” for everything, and social media connected to that, or are individual islands of communication. But what we see is that successful companies have social websites, where social media are integrated in a totally unique way. (Tania, consultant to CU)

## Working with Local Accounts

For both AU and CU, Facebook is the preferred social media used outside the communication department. There are also a few active accounts on LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. From the communication department and

social media specialists' perspective, these accounts are encouraged if they are purposefully planned and continuously attended. However, the local uses revealed that this was often not the case and many of the local social media users were somewhat distanced from coordinated uses. When operating the local accounts, the communicators seldom talked with representatives from the communication department, and if they did, the contacts were held with the social media specialists about content, how to align their activities and content, or sometimes not having a relation at all. But rather than coordinating social media within the university framework for communication, the local communicators' work was based on personal experiences and initiatives or on occasional discussions with departmental colleagues.

Nevertheless, the Communication directors at AU and CU are positive towards the use of social media at the local university departments. However, they also underline the centrality of the frames provided by the communication department to influence and guide the local initiatives. A similar notion is held by the social media specialists, underlining the local communicators' possibility to engage and operate social media independently while also acknowledging the importance of the central communication documents and guidelines. The possibility to regulate the accounts is nevertheless always under consideration, as illustrated in Maja's comment:

I would not hesitate to regulate the use more strictly if it were to be necessary. I have, for example, told them that I want to know if they start a new account. It is important for them to reconsider what the account is about before starting. Some start one [an account] anyway. (Maja, AU)

The local accounts are not monitored or followed daily but checks of activities occurred irregularly. The concern at the communication departments is the accounts with low activity levels or if they lack a clearly defined purpose. At AU, one of the study counselor's Facebook account was perceived by Maja to be rather inactive and therefore not used in an effective way. This counselor, however, acknowledged a lack of time to maintain engagement with the Facebook account she had created for her role, but she also perceived coordination and support from the communication department to be missing and therefore influencing her activity negatively. This study counselor was aware of the centrally produced communication plans and policies and where to find them, but perceived that the communication department had allowed communication and social media to be independently operated, and as such, left to operate on as she saw fit.

There is no central strategy, really, and I think that it is missing. I went to a course about social media at the university but find it hard to get started. And there is no input from above [communication department] either. It would be

good to know which tools to use. Here, at the department, we do not have a strategy either and I work more according to my own initiatives. (Lisa, AU)

Many of the local communicators are aware of the central documents for communication and social media, but they are not evoked in the everyday work with social media.

Students started writing to my private Facebook account and I felt uncomfortable with that. So, I talked to the previous Communication director, but no one really knew how to use social media, but it was ok for me to go ahead. So, I did the rest myself and I started a professional profile. [...] A month ago, I got on LinkedIn to keep contact with our alumni and to see where they go. I started it without contacting the communication department, nor did I look for guidelines on how to do it. It is hard to get that information on the intranet or the homepage. [...] I do not have any guidelines, but I follow my own. I have at some point seen the central guidelines for social media, but that is something I have not read in a long time. (Helena, AU)

As we see, the local account holders are active at their respective departments, with variously defined purposes and time allocated. Nevertheless, their connection to the communication department and the university's communication policy and strategy is often unclear. For example, Peter, a chair professor at one of the departments of AU, operated a Twitter account on behalf of his department, but "did not know what they thought about it centrally". And since many communicators work independently, they have also developed their own sets of guidelines or ideas for guidelines and approved (if at all) by the head of the department, and not in relation to the communication department. However, at CU a balance on the presence and impact of a central frame for communication, together with a local development for social media, was pronounced by the local communicators at a faculty level:

We are working on a draft for communication at the faculty. We, of course, do it in relation to the frames that are centrally produced: we can't to something completely different. There are frames, but we can fill it with our own content about what we do here. [...] For example, we talked to Sandra when we started Twitter. First, we thought that *of course we should be on Twitter*, but we found that posting news about the activities and research on the faculty and by our departments had best impact. (Selva and Mareike, CU)

## What Working with Social Media is Meant to Achieve (Symbolical Systems)

The purpose of our communication work is to contribute to the achievement of reaching the operational goals and to strengthen the university's brand in

accordance with the objectives found in our educational, research, and collaborative strategies. (Excerpt from communication policy, AU)

The communication strategy is to support the work of finding ways for a communication that allows space for brands on various levels. The goal is to find a form where the parts strengthen the whole. (Excerpt from communication policy, CU)

Communication is in the CU communication policy explained as supportive of its parts in creating an attractive whole. In contrast, the same document at AU focused on a singular brand. The findings showed that to work from the idea of *one* university to support a *branding* process, two purposes were seen to represent the adoption and use of social media: 1) as a tool to address and work with the increasingly competitive environment and b) to spread knowledge in collaboration with society. *Competition* was a particularly recurring argument among the communicators, with the “stake” being access to financial resources and support, recruitment of researchers, and visibility in the academic community. But most important was the use of social media for student relations and student recruitment. As such, competition was recurrently related to the brand and branding of the universities, which, in turn, reflected the idea of *one* university. These purposes are similar to the findings from chapters 5 and 6, which underlines the presence of similar ideas of and for communication and hence the purposes of social media. A central aim of the social media use is to recruit students and nurture student relations. In AU’s social media strategy, the following is stated:

There are various reasons for AU to use social media. The main reason is that it is a way to meet several of our target groups in the channels they are using and expect us to use. By using social media, another opportunity is created for information, dialogue, and but also useful in relation to prospective students, current students, alumni, researchers, the public and other interested parties. (Social media strategy, AU)

Hence, social media are used for certain activities and goals intended to support the universities. Especially made clear at the communication departments is the explicit understanding that social media needs to have a clear purpose when used, here illustrated by CU’s Sandra:

I am allergic to the idea that... “of course we have to be on social media”. No. It is not at all given. It depends on what you do with it, its purpose, and goal, regardless of whether we want to market ourselves or create a dialogue with citizens. (Sandra, CU)

From this perspective, social media are compared with, for example, using a video commercial or an advertisement in the newspaper: it is regarded as a communication channel and selected as appropriate for a given goal. The



communicators at the communication departments underline this necessity and stress the need for a clear idea before and during the use of social media. However, social media are adopted without pre-identified ideas of its purpose at the communication department and by local communicators. Arguments for its use included the “trendiness”, “being the right time”, and “good for visibility”. Even when the arguments for social media use at the communication departments were explicit, uncertainty in its purpose was always present, especially when the arguments were discussed between colleagues or in talks between communicators and researchers. The purposes could instead be understood as emerging and becoming defined over time. Hence, to initially follow trends based on the idea “we should be there” later transformed into more clearly defined purposes. Instagram is one such example where the purpose emerged during its use<sup>28</sup>:

Instagram is used for the students to display their student life. The account is mostly about recruiting students that has emerged and become clear with time. First, we just followed a trend. (Maja, AU)

For Instagram, the student aspect was initially not obvious to Maja, but became more apparent with time. This balance between certainty and uncertainty is discussed in the three following sections: first, I discuss the ideas of *what* social media are for, then present *how* the purposes emerge, and conclude by reflecting on the influences for social media use.

## What Social Media are for

For AU and CU, all university-common social media accounts are operated from the communication departments. Additional to the central accounts, there are several representing departments, study counselors, and other administrative functions and roles of the universities<sup>29</sup>. Most of the centrally operated accounts have a student focus: Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn are particularly adopted for communication activities, recruitment, and work with student relations. Twitter, on the other hand, is for sharing information and news. Local accounts predominantly used Facebook to engage in student relations, with the presence of the occasional Instagram or Twitter account. Thus, social media is broadly adopted in the universities, and even though there are defined purposes among the account operators, the purposes often changed.

This condition could be seen, for example, in the adoption of LinkedIn at the two universities. During spring 2014, it was initially not clear at AU who

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<sup>28</sup> This example is used in the introduction of the dissertation.

<sup>29</sup> “Central accounts” are here referred to as social media operated from the communication department and representing the university as a whole, while “local accounts” refer to all other accounts whose operations are located outside of the communication department.

was responsible for the university's account on LinkedIn<sup>30</sup>. Maja, the social media specialist, worked during early spring to determine whether anyone at the university had access to the account. In the months that followed, she encountered an employee working at the External Relations Department who was already engaged in the university's LinkedIn account. She explained that the channel was important to engage in because "it's going to be big", but they were both unsure about how to act and operate the account, and for what purpose. The two communicators came up with a plan on how to share the account and how it would be a place to manage alumni relations and to post job offers from the university together with the Personnel Department. Less than a year later, when I arrived at CU, I found their activities on LinkedIn to be delegated to the communication department's alumni group. Their use of LinkedIn, however, was limited to an "official" alumni group, and not to the official page that represented the university. Märta, the alumni coordinator responsible for the LinkedIn activities, focused much of her work on database issues and how to work with alumni information. Hence, there was already an active system with alumni information in place, but LinkedIn had emerged as a platform that Märta continuously returned to because the two complemented each other and because it was growing in use among the alumni. She later "claimed" the official page of CU on LinkedIn and so commanded administrative control of the page, but remained working with the group she created. Thus, at AU, the purpose emerged over time, whereas at my arrival at CU a year later, it was directly understood and established as a channel for alumni relations, as Märta described:

We had someone over to analyze social media for us some years ago. It was some communication consultant firm. They highlighted that LinkedIn was the social media that suited alumni. My idea was the same as the consultants and that strengthened me in my choice. (Märta, CU)

The uses of Facebook<sup>31</sup>, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter and its accompanying purposes, are diverse at the two universities. For example, Facebook was first adopted as an official channel at AU in 2009 because the channel was "timely". The choice to assume activities resulted in a Facebook *group page* for presumptive and current students and alumni. The group developed into a platform where university communicators and students are encouraged to talk everything related to the university and life as a student.

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<sup>30</sup> LinkedIn produces "official" university pages, often with tens of thousands of "followers" or alumni, which universities "claim" control over, or not.

<sup>31</sup> The universities are using two different types of function on Facebook: a *fan page* is a site with a more official representation that mainly contains information from the university, with occasional posts by visitors. A *group* is of a more informal character, with a larger content produced by various members that is commonly held together by a joint interest (e.g., studying at a university).

On central and local levels at both universities, the “students are there”-argument was vital for activities. However, use was not based on analyses on how the channels present opportunities for different types of engagement or possibilities to reach various groups. For example, the role of Instagram rested on varying arguments of its purpose, where communication department representatives had different understandings during its use and the students recruited to operate the accounts were uncertain about why they were posting on Instagram. A student viewed it as good for building a personal brand as one of the curators, but also as part of branding the university, including student recruitment aspects. Victoria, one of the Instagram students at AU, illustrated this point:

I think they just want to get more followers. I want to show what it is like to study. Many young people have a wrong idea about what it is like to study. I want to reach out to them. (Victoria, AU)

At the universities, we see that the ideas of what social media are for are diverse and developing over time, with an argument of target groups “being there”. This assumption is shared among communicators on all university levels.

## A Managerial View on Values and *One* University, Competition, and Branding

AU’s communication should be objective, clear, and relevant. Furthermore, it should be characterized by open-mindedness and transparency. (Excerpt from communication policy, AU)

From CU’s vision document, three core values have been developed: social responsibility, openness, and versatility. The core values of the university should capture what our operations and activities denote and the values it represents. (Excerpt from communication policy, CU)

University *values* are conspicuously displayed in the communication policies, although not reflected among the communicators when describing their social media activities. The supposedly shared values are central to the notion of *one*. However, values are not notably part of discussions about social media activities. *Transparency* (AU) and *openness* (CU) are values referred to in relation to being a governmental authority, social media needs to reflect that the universities share information and invite stakeholders to interactions. However, the activities surrounding social media show a difference between talk and action. The one-way communication ideal is dominant and social media are discussed in relation to the university brand. Thus, the purpose of social media was the idea of being part of *one*

university, which rather related to organizing and branding, and not reflecting the declared values. *One* university and the brand are central in the competitive environment. However, the competitive aspect and *how to* belong to a coordinated university is, as shown throughout the chapter, understood differently on different levels of the universities. The Vice-Chancellors present competition as rapidly becoming significant to their operations, and where they compete for resources, researchers, and students. In this context, the Vice-Chancellors perceive a need for coherency as a university is always judged as *one* organization.

Robin, Vice-Chancellor, CU: Resource allocation, for example, works because we are reviewed as one university. We as a collected unity receive money. We must get everyone to work *for us* to get as much as possible. However, we could not let one part starve while another grows because then the whole is not very good. But the system drives us towards *being one*.

Me: ...so you do not have much of a choice?

R: No, I don't think that we have. I mean, it is not about prestige for me, but our university must do it. It has become more like this since I started.

The Vice-Chancellors stressed their role as directors of a government agency, with a constrained period and thus a need to prioritize other activities than communicating via social media. From a university perspective, however, they underlined the need to use social media, especially in student recruitment, even though neither expressed any deeper interest in taking part in social media personally. However, CU's Vice-Chancellor reluctantly operated a blog. Concerning university management, the views on what to use social media for, and how to manage the channels, differ, and the deputy Vice-Chancellor (Inger), the University Director (Anders) of CU, and the communication strategist (Emma) at AU are all positive about developing a coherent and more active presence on social media. Anders is positive to development, but also critical about current uses:

I think the universities still have a lot to do. Look at the university's Twitter flows. They are not fast enough when updating news. They could throw out a line about receiving 100 million from a EU research fund, or about other things that happen, then link to their homepages or an analysis of some kind. But then there are public figures such as Vice-Chancellors who are so boring. I have talked to some of them. It is almost *North Korea* how some of them repeatedly publish about new successes. (Anders, CU)

Emma and Inger are not as critical as Anders about current uses, but believe that the communication departments could integrate and work more effectively with social media. Further, at AU, Emma views the digital

channels as a possibility for university management to be more open and transparent in order to create “goodwill” among internal and external stakeholders, even though she recognizes some resistance based on management believing it is more visible than it really is. At CU, the transparency argument was central part to the purpose of the Vice-Chancellor blog and a reason why Robin continued operating it.

## The Changing Purposes and Uses of Instagram: Twitter and the Swedish Institute as Inspiration for Instagram at Andromeda University

There is one source of inspiration that stands out in relation to AU’s social media work, and that is the influence on the university’s Instagram from the Swedish Institute and their project “@sweden” on Twitter<sup>32</sup>. Before launching her project to change the university’s activities on Instagram, Maja attended a course arranged by the Swedish Institute. She was inspired by the idea of letting “one Swede per week” represent the country. She borrowed the idea of weekly curators. She re-worked the idea and adapted it to the university’s Instagram account (an account that she had previously operated alone) before presenting it to the *Marketing Group* and the Communication director. Maja openly acknowledged that her idea was a “rip-off” and that the Swedish Institute’s project was the archetype:

When Instagram “boomed” in 2012, I thought it would be a clever idea to join the trend. I started and operated the account alone, but it got boring. In early 2014, I attended a course where the Swedish Institute presented the @sweden on Twitter project, and I thought that it would be a promising idea to use in my work with Instagram. [...] The aim is that students will show what student life is about. It’s basically for student recruitment, something that has become increasingly clear. Initially, we just followed the trend, but I was tired of photographing buildings. The “@sweden” idea seemed good.

For the developed activities on Instagram, Maja developed a one-page document with guidelines that were shared among the students selected to lead the account. Maja was clear that she did not want to control the students, but that it is important for the channel to be “free” and that is why the instructions were brief.

I will start the project by using familiar students; it is comfortable. It is risk-taking because you don’t want to control too much. I have had a meeting with the two starting students. We’ll see how it is received. It took the

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<sup>32</sup> The “@sweden” project was started by the Swedish Institute as an initiative aimed to market and brand Sweden as an open and democratic nation, allowing a new Swedish citizen every week to curate the official Swedish Twitter account freely.

Facebook group over a year to find a good format and get a lot of users.  
(Maja, AU)

The document for Instagram contains technical directions of how to operate the account and how to start by uploading a personal picture and adding your name. The guidelines for content explain the procedure:

The pictures you take for AU's official Instagram account should display your life here at AU. They can be personal but not private. You are free to highlight your week from different angles. [...] If you are engaged in anything, for example, sports, choir, or the student show, you are free to also display that. (Excerpt from Instagram instructions, AU)

Two Instagramming students were interviewed on their experience of curating the account and they agreed with Maja's approach that there was little control during the week they managed the account:

I got guidelines before I started, but I have departed from my everyday as a student. What one shows is up to you. The guidelines are up to you.  
(Mikaela, student, AU)

Instagram was changed to be fitted into a "better" purpose during the time of the study. However, uncertainties in the purpose were prevalent, and not least visible in how Maja and the students acknowledged its governance.

## Policies, Strategies, Guidelines for Social Media (Artifacts)

The role of documents has been incorporated in the presentation of the findings throughout this chapter. Here, I address their role more specifically. The two universities have a broad range of texts that addresses different aspects of how to work with communication and social media in the universities. Thus, the content of these documents is aimed at the creation of a common framework for communication that supports the overarching goals of the universities. In addition, it provides guidance and instructions to employees on how to approach and work with social media. At AU, the centrally produced documents were accessible on the intranet and open to all employees, whereas most of the centrally produced communication and social media documents at CU were available to both employees and digital visitors on the "Co-Worker Portal". At CU, there was also a collection of social media documents (e.g., "Instructions for student blogging" and "Channel strategy for Facebook") that was only accessible through the social media specialists at the communication department (these were also aimed at the communication department's work and not for all employees). The

locally produced documents are often considered as “guidelines” produced by the communicators operating the accounts.

We made initial guidelines for our Facebook activities using the communication departments’ document as a base. However, we developed the guidelines independently from the communication department. Me and a colleague wrote the guidelines and they were approved by the head of the department. We really tried to describe, for example, how to approach personal attack and similar issues on social media. (Janina, AU)

A central discussion at both universities was about the necessity of social media strategies, with an argument that such documents were necessary at an earlier point in time and when social media were new. However, as communicators’ experiences grew, the role of strategic documents diminished, and instead replaced by guidelines and “tips and tricks” aimed at the functionality of particular social media. The documents contained instruction for tonality, how and when to answer to posts and comments, writing style, the difference of being an employee or a private person, and on the role as a public authority.

Together with the emerging experiences of social media, a university’s role as a government authority was seen to provide structure to communication, here illustrated in a comment by Sandra:

A specific social media policy is not necessary. There were initially a lot of discussions about policy, but we landed in that a policy is not necessary. There are a lot of guidelines, but what we do need are documents with guidelines and support for what to think about. [...] Sometimes we talk about a toolbox, but yeah, it is guidelines. And we do not actively work to follow people and see whether they are doing wrong or not. We don’t have the resources for that. Also, let’s say that a department is doing something wrong. Then it is the head of the department who is responsible for their communication. Maybe we should train them. (Sandra, CU)

The Communication policies at both AU and CU contain sections on the conditions of being an authority, briefly describing the laws and regulations under which all universities operate. For example:

- “Regeringsformen och tryckfrihetsordningen”, regulating everyone’s right to freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, and the freedom of information
- “Förvaltningslagen”, regulating the obligation to serve the citizens
- “Högskolelagen”, where the obligation to collaborate with society and provide information about its activities are regulated
- “Högskoleförordningen”, regulating the right to information about education

The universities also operate under other laws affecting the communication work, and the presence of the overarching laws were also a reason for the Vice-Chancellor of CU to question further activities on social media. On the question of engaging channels other than the Vice-Chancellor blog, she was clear that it would not happen.

Absolutely. And I am clear on that. For the simple reason that I am the manager of an authority. And I would be obliged to take records of everything I do; everything that could possibly be of importance. Now, there has not been any trials or so, but that will come. I mean, with the enormity of the flows already today. Then someone must sit and contemplate whether it could become a matter later. And if I missed to take records of my Facebook flow, then I have committed an error. I cannot understand how all politicians have time to sit and work with their Facebook post and all that. To me it's a mystery. (Robin, VC, CU)

At CU, there were no overarching social media document, but instead several documents aimed at particular channels. However, on the “Co-Worker Portal”, there was a section on social media that guided employees and presented social media as “another opportunity for CU to communicate, create relations, enhance dialogue, and share knowledge in collaboration with the society”. On the website, there was further information suggesting how to work with social media, including the importance of having a clear sender and the use of names and logotypes. AU presented two overarching documents containing guidelines for all social media at AU. Both documents were accessible on the intranet. The first document presents the different channels used at the university, with focus on the official accounts as operated from the communication department, but also on the various characteristics and uses of these accounts. The second document was shorter and contained direct tips and guidelines on how to work with social media when being an employee at the university. This document was based on six “pillars” for engagement (tonality, quick answers, clarity, differentiating between private and professional conduct, being a public authority, think before). Thus, the central and basic ideas of working with social media at AU are mapped out for the employees in this document. The document also suggests a “check-list” when working with social media. Maja has informed communicators about the content of these documents on her visits around the university, documents that are focused on what to think about before and during operating an account, including a note to “report to the chief of the communication department”. Maja does not seek strict checks and control of how accounts actually operate, but wants to allow local initiatives the liberty to act according to their needs.



## Chapter Summary

The chapter presented findings from studying translations of strategic communication through fieldwork at two Swedish universities and their work with social media. The idea of a centralized control and responsibility to integrate communication based on the idea of being *one* university is present among the communicators throughout the universities, confirming the presence of core characteristics of conventional strategic communication. However, the social media specialists are working both in relation to the idea and norm of centralization, but at the same time endorsing the virtues of decentralized communication responsibilities and activities. The students in charge of university accounts operated independently and based their activities on personal preferences, however, in their work they also reflected on being representatives of the university. Responsibility is an issue related to centralization or decentralization of who is able to do what and where. The responsibility of social media gravitates around the social media specialists, and they are the reference points among the other communicators, be they Vice-Chancellors, Communicator directors, local department communicators, or students. The social media specialists are, however, trying to balance the how to operationalize a centralized responsibility and overview with the social media activities outside the central administration. The norm of centralization is challenged in both talk and action, but it is nevertheless a reference point for work with communication in the universities. Another closely related finding is the difference of arguments for social media activities as either centrally coordinated, but independently operated within a frame for communication (a view represented by social media specialists, university management), or as independent, but in relation to – or in need of – a centrally produced framework for communication and social media (a view represented by students, local communicators).

The local social media communicators were found to be operating their social media similarly to students: mostly independent, but also relating to and requesting a more active central work to integrate social media and communication. As a result, the *one* university may, be understood in terms of heterogeneity and multiple voices, rather than homogeneity and one voice representing one university. However, both differences and similarities are present, with conventional characteristics of strategic communication constantly present, but interpreted and enacted in different ways by the communicators. Social media, as a concept and potentially representing a recipe for communication of their own, were approached by communicators through what was considered a “proper use” of social media where independence and personality were emphasized (as a counterpoint to a stricter organizational framework for communication). Included was also the condition of the universities being government authorities, which was

presented as putting a pressure and responsibility on the communicators to be open, transparent, and allowing personal freedom and independence, a position contradicting a controlled coordination and integration of social media in the universities.

The results also presented an overview of what social media are interpreted to achieve. As a foundation for communication, I found the argument of competition and the consequent need for a strong brand to aid the organizational goals to be supported in the universities.

## The Findings of the Three Empirical Chapters: Where to Go from Here

The three empirical chapters have presented a broad analysis and overview of the role of social media in Swedish universities. The findings show how as set of concepts of strategic communication are present in the universities and exercises influence on communicators. The findings further show that translations result in inconsistent and sometimes contradictory uses of social media. What has been made visible is that strategic communication is translated in universities, but also that there are translations occurring all over the universities, relating to different position and roles, ambitions, experiences and backgrounds, and access to resources. The carriers of strategic communication support a variety of translations of the three identified and central concepts (being *one* university; purposes of social media; integration) of strategic communication in relation to the universities' social media adoption and use (Table 7).

Among Vice-Chancellors, Communication directors, and communication strategists, the characteristics of conventional strategic communication (centralization, coordination, a purposeful use) are highlighted and proposed to guide social media. However, the Vice-Chancellor blog challenges the integration concepts by not being included into a coordinated framework for communication. An overall responsibility for social media rests with the communication departments, and especially with the social media specialists. At the communication department, the notions of control are mixed with those of releasing control, and in the operation of social media the independence from coordination was tangible. What is prescribed for communication in central communication documents and at the university management has, according to a student perspective, been changed into an independent and uncoordinated communication work. Similar to students, communicators at department levels use social media somewhat independently, but because they perceive a lack of coordination, they tend to request initiatives from the central administration on communication issues. The shared assumptions of strategic communication are visible, but the following chapters further engage and elaborates how actors makes

individual translations in relation to various elements of the institutional carriers. Hence, in Chapter 8, the shared assumptions of and for communication act as points of departure to discuss and explore how similarities between and inside universities assumes localized shapes and different expressions in the work with social media work. The final Chapter 9 further discusses and provides explanations to the presence of inconsistencies and contradictions in strategic communication.

Table 7. Assumptions and carriers as a base for translations of strategic communication

<b><i>Shared Assumptions of Strategic Communication</i></b>	<b>Relational systems (relations and responsibilities)</b>	<b>Routines (organizing and daily work)</b>	<b>Symbolical systems (purposes)</b>	<b>Artifacts</b>
<i>Being one organization</i>	Staffing and responsibilities	Weekly meetings at CD	Increasingly competitive environment	Production of documents: Vision, communication policy and strategy, guidelines
<i>Purposes of social media</i>	Meetings (CD internal meetings, or between CD and non-central administration)	Daily routines and checking social media accounts	Social responsibility (as governmental authority)	Governmental regulations
<i>Integration</i>	Identity Relations within the university	Social media workshops Reporting to CD and social media specialist	Visibility Student recruitment Experiences and backgrounds Ambitions and preferences	Social media content Consultancy reports



## PART III – DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS



## 8. Dancing Strategic Communication

THE AMBITION OF this work is to challenge and contribute to the field of strategic communication by examining the differences in perceptions and practices in relation to the presence of shared assumptions of communication work in organizations. The role of social media in universities has been as a case, studied through the operationalization of two theoretically based assumptions, where strategic communication is understood as I) a socially constructed and institutionalized way of thinking about and doing communication and II) ideas and activities of communication made functional and meaningful by actors in local organizational settings under complex and ambiguous institutional conditions. The neo-institutional approach (and critique) to conventional strategic communication (with its managerial perspective on communication) focuses on how ideas and practices are embedded in social webs, and, by taking such a stance, it problematizes the role of managers and communicators as intentional and “rational” actors that mainly act and make decisions in relation to locally identified problems and solutions (c.f., Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996).

The findings, as presented in the preceding three chapters, show that strategic communication is a shared recipe for organizations’ communication, visible in its impact on how university communicators talk about and work with social media. Table 7 (in Chapter 7) provided an overview of the shared concepts and the carriers by which the purposes and how to work with communication in the universities were translated (being *one* organization, purposes of social media, integration). The carriers of strategic communication highlight a complex context (e.g., relations, roles, and influence of staff, varied purposes, and the relation to documents) wherein the translation takes place. Despite the similarities in the presence of these concepts between and within the universities, the outcome of how they are talked about and put into action is the focus in this chapter. For example, at the universities, the responsibility for coordinating social media activities is with the communication departments, but the findings reveal how the mandated responsibility assumes different shapes when it is operationalized by actors on diverse levels and whose interpretations, intentions, and possibility to make decisions based on their positions vary.

The chapter is structured according to ethnographical principles to allow the empirical setting and findings to guide the analytical discussion in company with the concepts presented in the literature review (c.f., Buscatto,

2016; Czarniawska, 2014; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Van Maanen, 2011b). Hence, in line with the findings of the three central concepts and based on the initially posed research questions, the analysis and discussion center on the role of social media in relation to 1) the strategic communication recipe – the ideas and norms of communication that exist in the universities (RQ1), and 2) the translations by actors in the universities – what the actors do with strategic communication (RQ2). The attention of this chapter is aimed at how the shared concepts in various ways are interpreted and produce several translations. Thus, the discussion centers on where, by whom, and what the translation contains. To discuss the findings, I adopt an illustrative metaphor of music and dance – Swing and Lindy Hop<sup>33</sup>. The beats and rhythms of Swing and the dance moves in Lindy Hop (the strategic communication recipe) provide the dancers (communicators) with cues for how to perform on the dance floor. However, what happens during the dance is also based on the experience and ambitions of the dancers, the type of equipment, the acoustics of the venue, and how the music comes through to the dancers. Thus, what happens on the dance floor can be compared with translations in organizations. Of course, the Lindy Hop dancers are aware of them being on the dance floor and of their performance. But when getting lost in music and dancing, all moves are not always thoughtful, but nevertheless performed. My approach is similar to the understanding of strategic communication: some “moves” in the adoption and uses of social media are intentional and similar, whereas others are unintentional, unique, and personal. The music and dance metaphor is introduced early in the chapter, but resting in the discussion and analysis of translations. However, the metaphor is used to illustrate the actors’ translations and dance with strategic communication in the chapter’s conclusion.

The structure of the chapter attends each of the three identified concepts to discuss how they are translated by the dancing communicators. The findings show a complex context permeated by differences of understandings and uses: a condition relevant to discuss in various organizations and organizational activities, but central to strategic communication with its expressed focus on consistency and coherence of communication. In other words, the findings show the presence of expected forms of and for communication and the use of social media, but with the

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<sup>33</sup> Swing jazz emerged in the United States during the 1930s in the wake of the Great Depression (Bruér & Westin, 1982). It is a jazz style focusing on a more rhythmic “feel” and “groove”, with Lindy Hop as one of the associated dancing styles. It was a popular music style, and what is called the “Swing Era” starting in 1935 with Benny Goodman (together with, e.g., Glenn Miller and Duke Ellington) (Blokhus & Molde, 1996). Lindy Hop has base in either 8 count steps or 6 count steps and with central moves such as the “triple step” and the “swing out”; however, it can be danced in different styles and tempos, as well as be improvisational.



translations resulting in differences, generating “functional inconsistency” (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017).

## Translations and Carriers of the Recipe

The university communicators find it necessary to have an idea of what the universities “are”, and what they “stand for” when engaging in social media. The notion of having a unique *identity* is shared between the universities and among the communicators, which is mainly expressed through the notion of being *one* university. This is perceived as a foundation to elaborate the purposes of social media, including the creation of a strong university brand, reputation, visibility, and student recruitment. The *one* university and the brand relate to the idea of having a clear and developed purpose for communication. Social media are viewed as appropriate communication channels for certain tasks to support the universities and their goals in an increasingly competitive environment. A key in achieving *one* university and a strong brand is the notions contained in the concept of *integration*, where a centralization of control and the planning of communication are factors for the success of the universities’ communication. The presence of shared assumptions for how the universities are working with social media (answering RQ1) is presented in relation to the translations of the particular concept (answering RQ2).

### A Recipe for *One*

As the communication policy at both AU and CU states that all the university’s communication initiatives and activities should be coordinated and made consistent, so does the idea of a coordinated *one* university resonate in the communicators’ views on the role of social media. *One* refers to having a shared set of values (with *openness* and *transparency* as recurring values), to communicate coordinated messages (e.g., how Facebook content and Instagram operations are to be aligned to communication policy, strategy or plans), and the consistent use of a university’s logotype and profile. Creating coherency in what the university represents (c.f., Hatch & Schultz, 1997, 2008) is deemed vital as a base for the ensuing branding, reputation management, and the general visibility to engage the competitive environment and communicate with stakeholders using social media. The many competing messages “out there” are understood as a driver for the appropriateness (and “obvious” reason) of being one university (c.f., Cornelissen, 2011). However, while a fragmented organization was perceived as a condition of being a university, it was also acknowledged as a threat. Even the universities with lower staff numbers are rather large organizations, with several hundred employees (the biggest

universities employ well over 6000 people). A diverse university was therefore considered an unavoidable condition of what the universities are about, and consequently, addressed by an active work to coordinate the communication and to promote values to unite the organization. The role of social media was here found as twofold: they are channels to address employees to create organizational “oneness” and they are channels through which the university may speak as one with its external stakeholders.

Malmö University’s Vice-Chancellor compared the problems with having an unclear identity at his current university to the clear and pronounced identity at his former employer (Chalmers Technical University), which stresses the importance of sharing a common identity. He and other Vice-Chancellors plan and use their blog not only to promote the university’s values (identified by the university management and present in the communication documents) but also as a more informal channel to inform employees on university activities, operations, and decisions as a contribution of what the university “is about” (c.f., Argenti et al., 2005). However, the Vice-Chancellor blogs are largely used as a top-down and one-way communication channel and, even though open to the possibility for comments and a potential dialogue, not encompassing the voices of employees and diverse interpretations of the university’s identity (c.f., Agerdal-Hjerminde & Valentini, 2015; Kent, 2013).

A metaphor of *mother and daughters* was used at CU, where the mother (CU central administration) provided an umbrella for the daughters (faculties, departments, research groups). The CU communication department (with the support of university management) worked to provide frames for communicators working at a “daughter” to adopt. The *one* university was considered a springboard for the creation of consistent, albeit locally formulated, messages and communication with the university’s stakeholders in the work to create, maintain, and improve the brand and reputation, and to support CU’s operational goals. The local communicators approved of the mother-daughter relationship, but emphasized the need for independence to make decisions regarding their communication. At AU, the local communicator Minna of the School of Music, Theatre and Art, did not recognize a relation to a coherent university, but rather felt disconnected and working with a distance to the university and the communication department.

The role of Instagram illustrates how the coordination of social media is based on an idea of organizational unity, but how different translations are visible in its operationalization. The social media specialists are responsible for the accounts, but at both AU and CU have handed over the operational responsibility to students. The students are not acquainted with the values or guidelines of their universities, but operate the accounts, as they perceive it, independently. The social media specialists acknowledge this fact but refer to keeping a balance between controlling communication (coordination) and

allowing the students freedom to post content. The *one* university is in the case of Instagram rather than a result of a controlled and coordinated operation a result of how the students understand themselves and their relationship to the social media specialists and the university.

Previous research has mainly had an intra-organizational focus to understand *one* organization when studying the possibilities and associated issues of coordinating an organization and its communication into a coherent entity (c.f., Christensen, Firat, & Cornelissen, 2009; Christensen, Morsing, et al., 2008; C. Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). In this approach, the organization centers on understanding and approaching how the one organization is to be constructed, paying less interest to the broader social context. Johansen and Andersen (2012) suggested a refocus from an intra-organizational approach to a perspective of co-creation between the organization and its immediate social context. These authors reason that the creation of *one* includes stakeholders, although still retaining an organizational perspective where the direct environment is accredited the understanding of what the one organization is and represents. These studies do not focus on the institutional embeddedness to elaborate and situate an understanding of the presence of the notion of *one* in the universities. In this thesis, the presence of the concept of *one* is considered not only a result of the strategic communication recipe (Sandhu, 2009) but also as emerging and developing in relation to the translations of the communicators (King, 2009). There is an interdependence between institutional carriers (Scott, 2003), but the main carriers for the *one* concept are found in the artifacts (communication documents) and in the relational systems with the position and role in the university (particular among university management and communication department personnel) influential in the promotion of the *one* concept. These represent a conventional perspective on strategic communication, with variations revealed in the balancing act of the social media specialist, and how the local communicators and students make individual translations. *One* is re-embedded and interpreted in different environments, where *editing* (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996) of the concept contributes to the variations of how it is locally expressed. The social media specialists themselves can be understood as carriers (and leading dancers in a “Swing for *One*”) as they work with creating symbolic materializations in terms of producing guidelines and acting as support through talks and presentations, i.e. they are intermediaries between centrally formulated interpretations of *one* and its translation in the communication departments and among local communicators, including students.

## The Purposes of Social Media

With the competitive environment perceived as a driver for communication, the universities are focused on the notion of how social media, according to

the idea of a coordinated and coherent organization, contributes to the university brand, reputation, and visibility to attract positive attention from stakeholders and to “sell” a product (education and research) (Carroll, 2013; Cornelissen, 2011). The purposeful application of communication, implying envisioning, planning, and pursuing different outcomes, is a central characteristic of strategic communication (Hallahan, 2015; Hallahan et al., 2007). Implied are notions of control and linearity of communication, referred to by Hallahan (2015) as a modernist perspective on strategic communication, corresponding to what I labelled a *conventional* perspective.

The communicators used the terms *brand* (in Swedish: varumärke) and *branding*, (varumärkesbyggande), i.e. the labels are not attached by the researcher. *Branding* is not a fundamental concept in the strategic communication literature as reputation is, but it does refer to the strategic approach to communication for how organizations are perceived (c.f., Argenti et al., 2005; Torp, 2015). At the senior levels of the universities, the views of the brand and reputation as important assets were made explicit verbally and in writing, and underlined as essential points of departure for all use of social media. Branding was especially related to the work with social media for student relations and recruitment, where Facebook and Instagram stood out, because, as one communicator put it, “that is where we should be visible”.

Social media are also regarded as channels to collaborate, share, and spread results of the research performed at the universities with the greater society. This is understood by the communicators as resulting from the status of being public organizations, but also ties into branding and reputation as a way to build a stronger public presence (c.f., Geschwind et al., 2016). For some communicators, this condition was also a point of reference, implying that communication documents were not necessary because normally governmental regulations and instructions are readily available and sufficiently supportive of their communication work. The notion was most clearly presented by Sandra at CU when referencing to the work by the E-delegation<sup>34</sup>. The condition, however, did not confront the presence of the communication documents in that it was not openly challenged or discussed by the communicators. Thus, social media are both perceived to support the creation of a university brand and as channels relying on the strength of the brand to enhance the university’s reputation and visibility to spread knowledge and be heard in society while competing for attention with other universities. This view was especially expressed as a focus area for smaller and younger universities and university colleges.

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<sup>34</sup> The E-delegation operated between 2009 and 2015 with responsibility to coordinate and develop “e-governance” for Swedish governmental agencies, a work also including the development of guidelines for social media from a legal perspective. The work by the E-delegation was overtaken by the PTS (The Swedish Post and Telecom Authority) in August 2015. See <https://webbriktlinjer.se/> (accessed 072017)

The Vice-Chancellor blogs showed content containing unique and differing activities and performances were accentuated, with the findings reflected in the interviews on the role of the blogs, which were seen as important channels for both the legitimacy and reputation of a university in the changing context of higher education (Falkheimer, 2014b). The interviews also made clear the role of platforms to engage a public debate, where the universities could be directly represented by the Vice-Chancellors. The Vice-Chancellors of Borås and Skövde Universities underlined the necessity for them to work harder than bigger and older universities to compete with their “established and stronger voices”. These smaller universities used the blogs as platforms for that purpose.

The findings from the fieldwork revealed a variety of communicators with varying definitions of the purposes and uses of each social media channel. However, goals were developed and associated with different channels (Hallahan, 2015). The uses of Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn have a main aim directed at student recruitment and activities to enhance relations to prospect and current students and alumni. Students are perceived as a target group increasingly active on social media, which would produce a need to locate resources and attention accordingly. University management representatives underlined this point, proclaiming the centrality of a student perspective and social media as a tool to aid the organizational goals of getting more and “better” students to apply and develop positive relations to the university (c.f. Argenti et al., 2005).

Artifacts, in the form of communication and social media documents, were central carriers to guidance adoption and uses among communicators, and with documents in some cases being central to operations. For others, they played a less significant role. However, the translations of purposes were also based on carriers such as professional roles and location in the university, with a focus on symbolic and relational systems and work routines (Muzio, Brock, & Suddaby, 2013; Scott, 2003, 2008b). An example is the use of students to operate official social media accounts. Students were engaged to operate several official accounts in both AU and CU to promote the university from a *student life* perspective and to (as developed over time) support student recruitment. The students displayed ambiguous interpretations of what their activities on Instagram and Facebook aimed to achieve, citing student recruitment, but also personal branding or that the university does not really know why they have an account and “just wants more followers”.

Purposes are manifold, with intermingling and interrelated carriers supporting the actors in their individual translations (c.f., Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Scott, 2003). Artifacts and symbolic systems are central carriers of purposes, where the official purposes meet and mix with the interpretations of the communicators’ ambitions and interpretations of the channels. Relations are also influential, where the social media specialists

play a key role to relay ideas in talks and other supportive measures between central administration and local communicators. However, the local communicators tended to produce individual interpretations of use and purpose that were pertinent to their immediate context.

## A Patchwork of Social Media Integration: Different Ways of Working with Social Media

*Integration* is the concept at the forefront of the operationalization of social media to make the channels functional in the universities. It is the concept drawing on the broadest set of carriers in the translations, with responsibilities and roles, daily routines, meetings, documents and regulations, and personal preferences and conditions of the communicators impacting the role of social media. Christensen, Firat, et al. (2008) described integration as the organizational practice of aligning and coordinating messages and activities to produce consistency. In a similar fashion, social media are placed within an idea of the university as a coherent whole and where communication activities and messages share both origin and goal. This concept is intimately linked to that of *oneness* and communicators on all levels presented versions of operating in line with the notion of belonging to *one* university. Centralization of control, with the responsibility at the communication departments, is a pronounced ideal among the university management representatives to lead the integration (c.f., Cornelissen, 2011; Zerfass & Huck, 2007). It is also an ideal encountered at the communication departments of AU and CU, as well as in the central communication documents of the two universities. Centralization and control in the universities stem from the idea that there is a possibility – and a responsibility – by the university management teams and the communication departments to oversee and coordinate the entirety of the organization. This idea, however, has been criticized and developed upon as epistemologically impossible in the sense that an organization can never be observed as a whole from any one viewpoint (c.f., Christensen, Morsing, et al., 2008). Social media are nevertheless located within such an ideal, with the operational responsibility located with the communication department and especially the social media specialists. The responsibilities include a direct operation of the central accounts representing the university on social media, while the other accounts (representing department, faculties, or other groups of the university) are coordinated from the communication department. Falkheimer and Heide (2015) challenged the idea of control in strategic communication (c.f., Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b), particularly in relation to social media. Concurring in the universities is the notion of a decentralized responsibility and control of accounts among the

communicators; however, they simultaneously refer to a starting point in the work for coordination performed at the communication department.

Together with the focus on a general centralization of communication, decentralization is also considered an important aspect, as based on understandings of the condition of universities being governmental authorities (e.g., stressing the freedom of speech of employees) and for social media to be operated “appropriately” (e.g., personalized and less formal content). Larger universities, such as CU, Lund University, and Stockholm University, are understood as necessarily fragmented and thus in need of coordination. Also, in geographically dispersed universities, like the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and Mid Sweden University, the need to centralize and coordinate social media is emphasized. However, the view that independence and local control of accounts and activities (while relating to the overarching communication policy, strategy, and plans) on social media are the key to success is encountered in university management, at the communication departments, and among local communicators. For this, the communication department supplies an umbrella under which communicators may act independently (Christensen, Morsing, et al., 2008). The Communication directors are confident to delegate the work and responsibility to the social media specialists to oversee and manage social media. The specialists assume the responsibility (however, at CU with the reservation of such responsibility actually being possible to fulfil), but they are performing a balancing act involving the integration between controlling and not controlling activities: a preferred description of their work is that they *guide* rather than *control* social media (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015).

The concept of *governance* was proposed by Zerfass et al. (2011) and Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) to create a more efficient use of social media. The social media specialists reflect on the central tenants of the concept when supporting and training communicators, developing guidelines, and monitoring social media activities. Localized and departmental social media activities are understood by communication department and local communicators to necessarily be part of a broader coordination, work emanating from the communication department. However, social media activities outside of the central administration were regularly performed by the local communicators without being coordinated within a central framework, but, with a local *call for* increasing central coordination. Local communicators (and students) portray a context of operating accounts either outside of, or without, the awareness of the communication department and the social media specialists, or independent of coordination initiatives. The aspects of the governance concept are adopted by the social media specialists, but it does not represent an impact on social media being integrated into a strategically planned framework for the university’s communication.

Maja, the social media specialist at AU, followed a routine of monitoring activities on social media three times a day, including the content and comments she posted, as well as any content that related to the university. The communicators at the CU communication department reported similar approaches to regularly monitor activities. Still, the CU communicators were not as routinized as Maja's daily work.

The relationship at AU between Maja and the communication strategist, Emma, reveals the impact and relevance of position at the university. Here, we see Emma's arrival to the university's Twitter as "strategic", whereas Maja had an informative and administrative role, reflecting the *technician* versus *strategist* roles of communicators (c.f., Hallahan et al., 2007). However, this was the only example of direct involvement of a university management representative. Except for this example, Maja was central to operations and development of the other channels and accounts at the university. She based her work on firsthand experiences and skills, the occasional and "loose" pressure from the university management, the influence from external projects (e.g., @sweden on Twitter), and her perceptions of the needs of the university. At the CU communication department, the situation is similar, but operational responsibility is further delegated to the different professional and work assignments. Märta is working the CU LinkedIn based on her understanding of where the alumni are located and active. The press secretaries post content (mainly press releases on research) on Twitter. Facebook and Instagram at CU are student-led though content and activities are planned via meetings. Nevertheless, the students are allowed an extended degree of freedom to post content that is not typical "dry and governmental".

From this result, we see how social media at AU and CU go through various translation processes, starting with the concept of a coordinated communication work (supported by the university management and by communication documents), the balancing act of the overarching responsible actors (social media specialists), the varied outcomes of operations by communicators and students on the central accounts located at the communication departments, and the local communicators loosely connected work to a centrally produced framework. The managerial top-down approach to communication is tangible in how social media are discussed, not only by managers but also by communicators working outside central administration units in the universities. The social media specialists are considered the managers of all social media activities. Even though they are conflicted about whether the work to coordinate a university's social media is feasible and realistic to perform they assume a leading role to influence, give support, and work with social media (there are different challenges in the two universities, where time and resources are critical in one case and the sheer amount of breadth and work in the other).



## Dancing Together Alone: From Carriers and Translations to Inconsistencies and Contradictions of Strategic Communication

Just like Swing has its beat and rhythm and Lindy hop expresses the music on the dance floor, so is strategic communication danced in the form of social media adoption and uses in the Swedish universities. With attention put on the social media accounts and the related communicators, the study has identified the presence of shared assumptions of strategic communication: communicators listen to the Swing jazz, and they are familiar with the steps of Lindy Hop. Hence, social media is managed as a result of institutionalized ideas, norms, and activities of communication, reflecting its social embeddedness (Sandhu, 2009). However, a noteworthy finding of this study is how translations of the shared concepts differ between and within the universities, i.e. how actors re-embedded elements of the recipe in relation to how it is formulated and meets the conditions of the context wherein it is translated (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). For the translation processes, the study also contains the identification of carriers, conveying different elements of the recipe (Scott, 2003, 2014). The carriers are the music sheets, the venue for dancing, how experienced and motivated the dancers are, who likes to dance with whom, and so on. The emerging picture shows how the styles of the dancers and how they interpret the Lindy Hop in their own way. What emerges is an untidy picture containing varying practices and perceptions of social media, and a context understood as consisting of inconsistencies and contradictions of organizations' strategic communication. Table 8 presents an overview of the carriers for translations in relation to roles and position of communicators in the universities. The overview illustrates how strategic communication is given different local expressions in the relationship between how social media are operated and formulated in talk and text.

The adoption and uses of social media challenge the strategic communication recipe: Vice-Chancellors blogging independently and the communication department representatives having opinions on social media management but also transferring the actual responsibility to the social media specialists. The local communicators worked with local purposes in mind (e.g., student recruitment to their department), used home-made logotypes, produced guidelines that sometimes were aligned to the central communication documents and sometimes not, and they operated their account with occasional connections to the social media specialists. The students recognize that they are representing the university, but the how, when, and which content they post is up to them to decide. Central to the role of the university's social media is the social media specialists.

Table 8. Carriers of strategic communication as expressed by different groups of communicators in interviews and during observations

	Artifacts	Routines	Relational systems	Symbolic systems
<i>University management</i>	Documents form and guide identity and the branding efforts Social media operated in line with communication documents	Have confidence in work at CD Blog in the hands of the VC	The CD has a responsibility for social media Social media are “where the students are”, needed to build relations	We are <i>one</i> university We need to use social media to be competitive We use social media for dialogue with important stakeholders (e.g., students, but also the higher education sector)
<i>Communication department communicators</i>	Part in production of communication policy and strategy	Work based on central documents Discussing social media at meetings Working with selected channels – to be informative	The social media specialist has a responsibility for social media Refraining from interfering with VC blogging	We are <i>one</i> university, but there are challenges as universities are “naturally” fragmented organizations Branding is necessary (but a “dirty” word) for visibility
<i>Social media specialists</i>	Relating their own use of social media to communication policy and strategy Social media guidelines and instructions guide communicators use The content in social media needs to be “personal”	Regular monitoring of central and local accounts Posting on official accounts to inform and engage stakeholders (students, journalists) and collaborate with society Coordinating and aligning activities in social media Mandated to control and correct social media	Balancing between central and local control All communication is done within the framework of the university Social media is used to build relations and visibility and it is necessary for communicators to be “personal” on their accounts	Social media to represent <i>one</i> university, for brand and reputation Having clear purposes in social media is necessary, but emerging purposes are acknowledged because of the relative newness. Social media use is also based on trends and thus a ground for emerging purposes New channels for dialogue Control and social media are problematic “That’s where the students are”
<i>Local communicators</i>	Have seen the central documents, but produce own guidelines	Requesting improved coordination Working alone and independently at departments, with awareness of centrally produced documents for social media and communication	We are one voice among several at university and need to avoid drowning in overarching communication Have relation to the social media specialists and awareness of work, but uncertain if awareness is mutual	We <i>should</i> be <i>one</i> organization Identification with department, faculty or group Social media to create department visibility and to recruit students
<i>Students</i>	Limited consideration for guidelines, communication policy, and strategy	Posting regular content on the CU Facebook CU, “a good headline is important”, or when “suitable”.	Loose relations to social media specialists (instructions in email, or talking/meeting)	Represent self and university For branding and student relations To show what it is like to study (Instagram)

Borrowing a description from Nothhaft (2010), the specialists are considered social media managers in terms of both first- and second-order management, by working directly to plan, organize, and control activities, but also as leading the internal work by promoting certain ideals and approaches to social media. They are working in relation to carriers of strategic communication, but can also be identified as carriers in their roles as responsible for social media. They are managing the university's social media in between expectations from the university management and their colleagues at the communication department, but also from local communicators searching and students for whom they function as guides and points of reference for how to work with social media. The current findings support the presence of a variety of roles of the social media specialists, roles that are variously related to by communicators on different university levels (Table 9).

Table 9. Three roles of social media specialists

<b>Controller and Coordinator</b>	<b>Inspirer and Motivator</b>	<b>Follower</b>
To uphold and maintain a coordination of social media in relation to a central framework for communication. A controlling role.	Balancing centralization and decentralization of social media control and responsibility. A supporting role.	Influenced by social media activities external to the university

First, the role as *controller and coordinator* is based on the presence of the strategic communication recipe and its central concepts, and where the work and responsibility are to promote a common framework of communication for social media. Communicators and their social media accounts are therefore placed under an umbrella for communication that the social media specialist is responsible to uphold. The second role is as an *inspirer and motivator*. Because social media are considered increasingly familiar channels, but also as new and uncertain platforms forms for communication, the social media specialist acts to motivate engagement, to support activities, and help communicators formulate strategies for operations and content. This role is balancing the pressures to integrate, with ideals promoting less control of social media. The social media specialists are also torn in their own use, basing their work more on personal experience and ambitions rather than clearly working to integrate their activities to the general framework. The third role is identified as the *follower*. The specialists acknowledge the influence of projects they deem successful, perhaps most visible in the Instagram project at AU. Social media are sometimes adopted

without identified purposes for their use, but used because it is “expected” and trendy. The social media specialists are standing in the middle of the dance floor, acting as supportive choreographers who encourage independence while simultaneously promoting and knowing the “right” moves, and are prepared to interfere if the dance gets too different or out of hand.

## A Complex Context of Similarities and Differences of Strategic Communication

The members of university management and the communication departments’ representatives are experienced dancers, set in their ways. They know the right moves and they encourage others to dance similarly, be it a “triple step” or a “swing out”. The Vice-Chancellors prefer to stand on the scene, tapping their feet to the music and watching while the others perform the dance moves. However, when they do take to the dance floor, they prefer improvisation (VC blogging). The local communicators are dancing alone at the room’s periphery, throwing glances into the middle of the room. They are happy to dance, but sometimes they long for a partner, and not someone asking to dance only occasionally. They are sometimes worried that there is no one who wants to dance with them. The students are mostly improvising their steps to the Swing, but they are acquainted with the dancer in the middle of the floor. The dancer everyone is looking at is the social media specialist, standing in the middle of the dancefloor, hearing and liking the music, knowing the steps, but also improvising when feeling the groove. The specialist is happy to help anyone who asks, but also recognizes the problem of teaching everyone how to do the Lindy Hop properly. Instead, the specialists encourage the other dancers to improvise, as improvisation is just as much a part of the dance as following the established and approved steps.

The music is not always to the liking of the dancers and some of it is incomprehensible, but they dance anyway. If taking a quick look at the floor the dancing may seem to reflect homogeneity and the dancers performing the same moves. However, looking closely at each dancer reveals that the Swing and the Lindy Hop look different: the dancing actors are rather heterogeneous. Despite the differences and inconsistent dance steps (one takes long steps, one swirls faster than another and another dances slow), they are all dancing together. What matters is where you lay your gaze. Nevertheless, it all seems to work. Dancers have different possibilities owing to their experience, ambitions, and locations on the dancefloor, and with that in mind, we can listen to Swing with other ears, and perform our dance “together alone” (c.f. Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). What this analysis and discussion reveal is a complex organizational landscape where inconsistencies and contradictions are present and should be acknowledged

rather than seen as problems (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017). The strategic communication recipe is present in the concepts of *one* university, developing purposes, and integration activities. However, these concepts are interpreted differently because of the institutional conditions and context, which is addressed in Chapter 9.

In the concluding Chapter 9, the findings and discussion are brought into an explanatory framework where the neo-institutional perspective helps understand the inconsistencies and contradictions of strategic communication. The findings are also discussed in relation to development of universities and university communication, as well as the relation between social media and strategic communication.



## 9. Conclusions: Strategic Communication as a Dance Floor of Functional Inconsistencies

THE ANALYSIS OF the findings shows that inconsistencies in the strategic communication practices are present between and within universities. At the same time, there is a relationship between what goes on in the universities and the strategic communication recipe, i.e. an ongoing dance between individuals, organizational conditions, and institutional pressures and demands. Thus, the findings reveal that everyone is “doing” communication within a shared framework, but differently. This should not be understood as failed or wrongful communication management, or that the ideals of and work with communication are a result of bad practice; rather, it should be viewed as a result of the institutional conditions of organizations and the recipe for communication (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2013; Fredriksson, Pallas, et al., 2013). Differences between and within organizations can be interpreted as a consequence of the fabric of the music, the dance, and the location of the performance. The communicators dancing the strategic communication dance have their personal moves while relating to how others dance to the music that is being played. The differences are translations by actors that negotiated, interpreted and reformulated the strategic communication recipe into local conditions (c.f., Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996).

This chapter begins with a few acknowledgments. First, I recognize that managers and communicators are working strategically with communication (however, the understanding of what is strategic differs from that of the institutional perspective). Second, communication can and should be understood as an organizational function (however, how to control and plan communication to fulfill organizational goals and objectives benefits from recognizing the institutional conditions of organizations and communication). The “purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 3) is a central assumption in strategic communication. Through the study of the role of social media in Swedish universities, the findings also acknowledge how *intentionality* is present and part of the universities’ communication policy. This is neither surprising nor unexpected. But this is also where things become intriguing: by assuming a neo-institutional perspective to study and understand strategic communication, the complex, inconsistent, and often contradictory

conditions for communication are propelled forward to expose the views of the strategic communication actors as intentional and rational decision makers (c.f., Sandhu, 2009). To analyze how communication was conducted in organizations, the homogenizing pressure of the strategic communication recipe was identified in its impact on social media, and with the main contribution from the understanding of how managers and communicators made social media meaningful through local enactments (c.f., Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Shared norms and ideas of communication are powerful and present in the universities; however, the micro level differences are an unavoidable part of organizations' ongoing communication work (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016b). Consistency of talk and action is considered good practice and proper organizational behavior, but also inconsistencies have been understood as positive, progressive, and supportive to communication work in organizations (c.f., Bromley & Powell, 2012; Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017; Huang, Baptista, & Newell, 2015). Brunsson (2002) refers to this as a condition of organizational hypocrisy in which the relationship between what is said, decisions, and actions are loosened because of organizational responses to the contradictory demands and pressures of their environments (c.f., Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The communicators draw variously on the strategic communication recipe that, via different carriers and in relation to local conditions, produces a form of hypocrisy in the social media practices of the universities.

The findings showed how the concepts *purposes* (for branding, reputation, visibility, student recruitment), *one* organization, and *integration* interacted with the role of social media. Thus, by confirming the presence of these characteristics of strategic communication at all levels of the universities, the argument of its institutionalization is supported (Fredriksson, Pallas, et al., 2013; Sandhu, 2009; Ansgar Zerfass, 2009). This contribution helps challenge the assumption that communication is a managerial function, where strategy is approached as rational decision making and that communication can be intentionally and purposefully planned to generate expected outcomes. Thus, strategic communication should not be understood as operating along a logic of locally finding solutions and making decisions to solve problems, but as activities based on the institutional pressures and expectations on communication in the organizational environment. Adhering to established forms for communication is about organizational legitimacy that is necessary for the "right to operate" (and even to survival) (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Suchman, 1995). In this perspective, *strategic communication does what it is supposed to*, but differently than presumed. In other words, it is abiding and fulfilling institutional expectations, but not as often explicated by the managers and communicators working along the strategic communication recipe. For example, by creating communication departments staffed by



professional communicators and initiated senior managers, the adherence to expected organizing of communication signifies the performance of “proper” communication work, to signaling reliability (whether efficient or not to the particular organization) (c.f., Meyer & Rowan, 1977). At the same time, *strategic communication is not doing what it is supposed to do*, but expected features are present. This is a reflection on how organizations, for instance, adopt communication policies and strategies, or how the ideal of *integration* is shared and promoted. However, these ideas, norms, and plans rarely fulfil intended purposes and intentions; instead, we encounter a variety of interpretations and uses that are meaningful and functional to different actors (see Table 8 in Chapter 8). The dancing on the dance floor is a result of the music being played, the venue in which the dance takes place, and dancer participants. The music is the same, but the dancers have different preferences and their grooves differ. It looks like they are all doing the Lindy Hop and we can hear that Swing playing, but the dancers perform their personal moves and steps, swirl on different beats, and nod their heads back, forth, and to the sides. The coming section elaborates on the condition of simultaneous homogeneity and heterogeneity of strategic communication.

## Understanding Inconsistent and Contradictory Practices as Translations

In Chapter 3, two assumptions based on neo-institutional theory were introduced to determine the understanding and study of strategic communication. With these in mind, we are able to determine the findings and role of social media as resulting from the institutionalized recipe of strategic communication through linking macro and micro levels (c.f., Bitektine & Haack, 2015). The first theoretical assumption introduces the condition of the present similarities:

Organizations work similarly with communication as a result of strategic communication being an institutionalized idea and practice. Strategic communication offers legitimate activities and ideas, making the prescribed recipe difficult to circumvent, thus, simultaneously problematizing the view of rational and independent decision making, and the intentional communication work in organizations. (*Assumption 1, initially presented in Chapter 3*)

The audience watching the dancing, and the dancers themselves, have certain expectations on how it should appear and be performed, even if some steps and moves feel uncomfortable or are unsuitable to the dancer. Strategic communication “works” not primarily because of its efficiency or outcome of activities but because it is the appropriate thing to do (c.f., Kraatz &

Block, 2008a; March & Olsen, 2008). From this position, I do not argue with the existence of intent and ambitions in strategic communication practices, or the planning of communication to influence various stakeholders. Rather, I suggest that the social embeddedness of its practices is undervalued and to a certain extent unrecognized while strategy and intent tend to be overestimated. In the words of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), universities are part of an *organizational field*, where the environment of the organizations help create similarities - in this case communication and social media (c.f., Rao & Sivakumar, 1999). The main homogenizing pressures and elements of the recipe were identified to be the concepts of having and developing clear purposes of using social media, being part of *one* university, and the integration of all communication, which impact the role of social media on all organizational levels. In the daily operations, these were visible in the form of communication documents, such as communication policy and social media guidelines, roles and responsibilities, and hierarchies when making decisions. Also, the role of the communication departments and the responsibilities of communicators at all universities are examples of how the pressures had a similar impact on the universities (c.f., Falkheimer, Heide, Simonsson, Zerfass, & Verhoeven, 2016; Ansgar Zerfass et al., 2014). Thus, the functional-managerial perspective was influential in how social media were organized, who were responsible, and for the presence of purposes they were to serve. The recipe for communication is the Swing that is playing with consequent effects on the organizing and activities of communication.

The social media specialists are assigned a role to oversee all social media activities, including the responsibility for coordination and operationalization. However, the role was contested by the specialists themselves and understood as difficult to accomplish. The problems they identified were based on not only the possibility to control and oversee activities of the university accounts (c.f., Christensen, Morsing, et al., 2008) but also the struggle between central control and decentralized responsibilities (as the potential of social media was considered based on and related to the individual user's voice). Furthermore, time and resources were an issue identified by the specialists, a notion reflecting the possibility to manage communication if only the right conditions were present. Nevertheless, the presence and influence of the coordination ideal (integration of communication) and the role of the social media specialists are thought to represent expectations of the communication recipe.

At CU, the communication work was described as decentralized, with more independence and initiative entrusted in the faculties and departments. However, a central communication department was active and with a responsibility to coordinate all social media in the university, similar to AU. The sector interviews also confirmed the presence and responsibilities of communication departments among the Swedish universities. Thus, according to the universities, a centralization of planning and responsibilities

for social media is necessary to produce coherent and consistent activities and messages. The findings contradict those of Macnamara and Zerfass (2012), who found organizational social media used without an integrative framework or being strategically planned.

## Blending In to Stand Out

As Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) noted, conventionality is a cherished value to organizations. A central argument for the use of social media concerns purposes, and especially the perceptions of how a unique university brand is crucial to stand out in the competitive environment. The universities, however, must perform a balancing act between “fitting in and standing out” (see Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2016 for a similar struggle in Danish museums and name changes). Blomgren, Hedmo, and Waks (2016, p. 189) referred to this as a legitimacy-reputation dilemma. The authors carried out a study on hospitals’ communication where they noted that the hospitals’ work was “special in an ordinary way”. In this study, the content and arguments of Vice-Chancellor blogs were found presenting and promoting “unique” and differentiating content on their own universities’ performances or role in the higher education sector and in society. The Instagram accounts were aimed to be “true and vivid” images of the university. The VC blogs and Instagram accounts are examples of how similarities clash with ideals of being different. This dilemma can also be seen as organizations *blending in to stand out*. Put differently, social media are organized and operated similarly, but with the idea and intent to communicate unique messages that differ from those of other universities. However, the study shows that the differences are not mainly visible between the universities, but are only obvious in the daily operations on the micro levels of the organizations. Similarities and differences are based on ongoing interactions between macro and micro levels, where each actors’ interpretations, ambitions, experiences, and local organizational conditions meet the institutionalized norms and ideas (Bitektine & Haack, 2015).

## The Individual and Locality as a Base for Inconsistencies

Differences in views and practices are based on the translations by individual actors and the carriers of the recipe. The second theoretical assumption informs the theoretical and empirical approach of the dissertation:

Individuals and groups within organizations translate strategic communication differently while drawing on institutional elements in relation to the local conditions consisting of, for example, relations, experiences, ambitions, and available resources. (*Assumption 2, initially presented in Chapter 3*)

While dancing, all the dancers hear the same music, and with the music there are certain ways to make it into a dance. But the dancers bring the music into their “world”, and what the outcome on the dance floor will be varies between the dancers. Although the centrality of purposes for how to approach and “use” communication, the *one* university, and integration are concepts that permeate social media and communication in all universities, contradictions abound in the perceptions and practices of the communicators (c.f., Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017). The translation study resulted in an understanding of the strategic communication recipe and characteristics as heterogeneous but which initially appeared as homogeneous. On its way into the universities, strategic communication has been disembedded, reformulated, and ultimately shaped into new contexts. The organizing, responsibilities, instructions, and planning of social media were influenced by the recipe, but in the meeting with the universities contexts it became negotiated, resisted, and reformulated (c.f., Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). Based on previous knowledge and experiences of communicators, internal and external relations, positions and roles, and drawing on the local context, the practice of social media uses similar labels, but differs in the how they are practiced. The status of the universities as government authorities and the “nature” of social media were also influential as to how social media were practiced. These conditions were not found to supersede the strategic communication recipe, but are understood as conflicting institutional pressures and demands, addressed in intra-organizational responses in translations by communicators focusing on different elements of these pressures (c.f., Pache & Santos, 2010).

The translations of ideas and practices start before the arrival to the organizations, carried by, for example, consultants and projects and initiatives in other organizations (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002; Scott, 2003). The universities’ Instagram and the Swedish Institute’s Twitter project are such examples. When the ideas for communication are fitted into those of the universities’, the translations were shown to relate to ambitions and preferences, as well as different professions and formal roles (c.f., Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Pallas, Fredriksson, & Wedlin, 2016). And in the universities the translations were variously made sense of according to communicators’ location, backgrounds, and intentions. The Vice-Chancellors (and the university management) translated the elements of the recipe in a way comparable to a conventional perspective on strategic communication, representing a top-down approach and control of communication. To them, integrating social media into the university’s overarching framework for communication was necessary because being *one* university was required for the brand, reputation, and visibility. In the communication departments the social media specialists and the Communication directors had a largely synchronized approach to operational responsibility of social media by leaving it in to the specialists (except for

the Vice-Chancellor blog because the Vice-Chancellors considered it an exemption from integration), and with the Communication directors only involved to make official informed decisions. The local communicators often danced with a feeling of loneliness, requesting the music to be played clearer, and the moves to be shown yet again so that all danced together. They translated the elements of the recipe based on the conditions of and for the department or faculty, rather than the university. Less importance was given to the central documents, although they were often aware of them. The active students were even further distanced from being integrated, operating the university accounts based on their own experiences and interpretations of purposes, but also reflecting on representing a government authority. The operations of the central university accounts at communication departments are “closer” to the concept of integrated communication. However, the operation of accounts at local departments reveals a reality in which responsibilities are uncertain, and where coordination is lacking and even requested by the local communicators.

Misinterpretations and inconsistencies between what is perceived and practiced in different organizational parts of organizations are inevitable (Brunsson, 2002). The meanings of labels and concepts inherently vary. Looking at, for instance, the idea and practices associated with the integration of communication and being *one* organization, we see that the idea changes and takes on different interpretations and meanings. At the management level, the idea takes on a more abstract form, possible to interpret and understand as a form of aspirational talk (Christensen et al., 2013). Thus, senior managers and communicators take part in shaping and approving the central communication documents, but are less engaged in the operationalization of the documents. The members of the communication department “do” integration when both designing central ideas for communication and coordinating communicators outside the communication department. But already here the idea starts to lose meaning, tangible in how work and decision making is made independently by communicators. A plausible argument is that the values of an organization may become internalized by communicators though the Instagram example suggests the communicators act out of experience and in relation to institutional pressures rather than instructions from the university management. The communication policies and strategies, the Vice-Chancellors, and Communication directors express explicit views on what coordination and centralization are, but those do not correspond to the findings showing what happens on the dance floors of the universities. The discrepancies, however, were not found to disrupt the universities’ communication, but can be interpreted as functional and the results of the institutional context.

## Functional Inconsistencies

The ideas and practices of communication as an intentional activity are not new to organizations (Torp, 2015). The ideas of consistency of communication and the managerial outlook to plan and control communication have emerged and been established in organizations and among communicators over a hundred years ago, whereas from the mid-2000s the concept strategic communication has emerged as an approach to talk about communicative practices of organizations (c.f., Ewen, 1996; Falkheimer & Heide, 2014a; Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Ihlen, 2013). This study started from the premise of differences and inconsistencies as part of strategic communication, a condition that challenges a conventional view on strategic communication in which integration and consistency are core assumptions. The findings recognized the existence of differences and highlights the difficulties for managers to approach and exploit them in organizations. The ideas and practices of social media are constructively understood as made functional from the view of “organizations as multifaceted and potentially contradictory constructions, a characteristic that is decisive for how they can conceptualize goals, values, and principles and perform their communication activities” (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017, p. 476). Strategic communication is a functional inconsistency, beset with contradictions, struggles, and individual interpretations. By approaching strategic communication as a depiction of its institutional conditions, we can appreciate the differences as fundamental to communication. It is also an opportunity to revisit the notion of managerial control and planning and put emphasis on the emergence of communication (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). Communication management is the result of a complex process that includes the institutionalized pressures and demands (from the environment) and the actors’ translations (from within the organization), challenging the functional-rational managerial outlook from two sides. Dancing is never straightforward, but we must learn about and accept the personality and conditions of dancers, even though they are dancing together on the dance floor.

## Universities and Communication

All types of organizations, including universities, operate in environments where signaling organizational clarity and coherence to the surrounding environment is premiered (Kraatz & Block, 2008b). The context of universities, however, is complex and filled with contradictory conditions, demands, and expectations. The modern university has been described as a *multiversity* to illustrate how parts of a university operate according to various conditions (Krücken, Kosmützky, & Torka, 2007). Being outwardly

consistent in such an environment is nevertheless an ambition of universities (c.f., Wæraas & Sataøen, 2014), but also an internal ambition visible on higher university levels as shown in this thesis. As a result, communication assumes a role as an organizational function in the universities. Is it working in the anticipated ways? Most often it does not. A key issue is that strategic communication is institutionalized and as such provides a frame for what and how communication is to be “done”, but translations create a context of functional inconsistencies that act to respond to the institutional ambiguity of the universities (Sahlin, 2013).

The professional communicators in the universities represented an instrumental approach to provide the organization with support and aid in achieving goals (student recruitment and enrollment process, developing the university brand and reputation, integrating communication, and developing organizational *oneness*). However, there is an appreciation of communication being difficult and problematic that result from the conditions of being a university, but also because of problems and strained relations between different elements of a university. From the communication department, the social media specialists worked from the notion of controlling and governing communication, but the practice of social media, which also relied on the idea of decentralized control, balanced between coordination and decentralization, leaving local communicators wondering whether their practices were proper. Nevertheless, the local communicators acknowledged the possibility to operate freely, although often outside of the framework of centrally produced communication documents (and contrary to the perceptions by senior management and communication department members). In other words, there is a request for improved relations and exchanges, as well as clarifications on how to work with communication. The challenge is to keep updated about needs, problems, and initiatives while also acknowledging that differences are part of communication work.

Wedlin (2008) and Ek et al. (2013) pointed to a development towards a marketization of Swedish universities that includes the notion of increased competition. The present findings also show that the planning and execution of communication activities are strategically important for the universities. Competition on a national level was discussed among smaller and younger universities, something also recognized by the larger and older universities, but the latter also aim at international competition (c.f., Wedlin, 2006). One question that is of interest is whether, or to what degree, public organizations should engage the planning and organizing of communication in order to stand out and be heard, especially if the results reveal that the “strategic” implementation and use to fulfill and contribute to organizations goals are a way to *blend in* than a way to *distinguish oneself*. Whatever the underlying reasons (e.g., marketization, competition, public sector development, or environmental pressures), the results beg the question of communication’s

role and in which ways it contributes to the objectives of the universities. It is an issue of legitimacy as much as one of reputation, branding, and visibility.

Universities are complex organizations, especially when trying to internally coordinate identity and values (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009), but also in relation to external stakeholders in which resistance creation and differing interpretations are part of the brand (c.f., Aspara, Aula, Tienari, & Tikkanen, 2014; Johansen & Andersen, 2012). The creation, presence, and management of a university brand are hence complex issues that are difficult to encompass and approach by the pervasive managerial perspectives alone. This study addressed the intra-organizational processes and found more contradictions and issues than answers and clarity. The issues are more importantly relevant to address from the perspective of the universities being arenas consisting of differing voices and ideals, and as democratic organizations (Olsen & Maassen, 2007; Unemar Öst, 2009). The findings reveal a prism of voices and experiences of various people in the studied universities, while communication activities at the same time were attempted to be aligned, coordinated, and brought into *one* coherent university. The identified inconsistencies are important not only to recognize to support organizational democracy in diverse organizations but also a fundamental insight for organizations and their work with communication. The strong emphasis on the *oneness* concept is problematic if universities are to remain open and encouraging of differences, notably as it clashes with the vast inconsistencies of voices that are a condition to all organizations. Thus, the universities should encourage its dancers instead of trying to make the dance conform, despite how tempting the idea may seem.

## The Role of Social Media in Organizations' Communication

Social media research has grown rapidly during recent years (Kent, 2015; McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). In this thesis, social media were approached as channels within a strategic communication framework. Thus, the affordances of digital channels *per se* were not addressed, but as indicators of the conditions for strategic communication. The findings, nevertheless, constitute an empirical contribution to the discussion on social media in relation to the communication of organizations.

Kent (2013, p. 344) assessed that “our lack of understanding of innovative technology, and implementation of innovative technologies simply to serve marketing and advertising interests have led to less civic participation”. The role of social media in Swedish universities portrays Kent’s assertion in the sense that the channels were largely approached as organizational tools to



manage the university brand, reputation, and visibility rather than for their potential to engage in dialogue with stakeholders. Still, university managers and communicators were considerate of the dialogical potential of social media, but engaging and inviting stakeholders to open discussions were secondary to supporting university goals and objectives.<sup>35</sup> The Vice-Chancellors blogs were not written with dialogical intentions, but rather were considered one-way information channels. With students leading the Instagram accounts, the posts and comments are interchanges between stakeholders and students representing student life (not the university and its employed communicators). Similarly, at CU, a student mainly operated the Facebook account, which unfolds the question of how dialogue is a useful ideal if the interactions are not taking place between the university employees and stakeholders. There were also cases of interaction between university communicators and external stakeholders (e.g., students and journalists), but these were not prioritized activities. The universities did not cater to or create platforms and opportunities for stakeholders to engage and express their opinions in open (and uncertain) exchanges (c.f., Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). Thus, the channels were attempted to be instrumentally incorporated into a strategic communication framework rather than adopted for their potential to alter power relations between organizations and stakeholders.

Social media and the Internet are broadly considered to offer organizations a “human voice” and to empower their stakeholders (Solis & Breckenridge, 2009; Weinberger et al., 2009). These views, however, are not supported by the findings in this study. Yet, it is possible to understand the uses of digital channels as *aspirational* and that organizations are on a track to future dialogical engagement with stakeholders, but at the moment experimenting with the potential of dialogue (c.f., Christensen et al., 2013).

It can be argued that social media contribute with their own set of principles (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). For instance, as a new set of moves considered to improve the established ways of Lindy Hop. However, I chose to approach social media as channels operating under the umbrella of strategic communication, i.e. as moves operating to the Swing already playing - not replacing it, but suggesting diverse ways to play. What the findings suggest is that notions of strategic communication are present and imposing on the social media practices, but also that they are continuously

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<sup>35</sup> The concept of dialogue is ubiquitous when discussing the use of social media in organizations. Theunissen and Noordin (2012) raised concerns about the un-critical understandings of the concept (c.f., Kent & Taylor, 2002). The authors pointed to dialogue being “a process and not an outcome” (2012, p. 10), and that a key feature of dialogue is its inherent unpredictability. Organizations engaging in “true” dialogue need to be prepared for results that are potentially unfavorable. However, as dialogue is a process. Organizations have the possibility to engage and create opportunities for stakeholders to express themselves or engage the organization.

challenged through translations. For example, the issue of centralization and decentralization was persistent in the operationalization of social media in the universities. The actors' continuous negotiations and balancing act between the strategic communication recipe (e.g., centralization of control) and the ideals of social media (e.g., decentralization of control) produce locally tailored practices and varieties across the organizations (c.f., Brunsson, 2002; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017; Pipan & Czarniawska, 2010). The results showing different interpretations of communication should not be mistaken as applicable only to the context of social media and strategic communication, but as a condition for diverse organizational activities (c.f., Kraatz & Block, 2008b; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Thus, to understand strategic communication as managerial and top-down activities is reducing the approach to strategic communication as an organizational practice (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). For example, approaching the issue of control, Linke and Zerfass (2013) suggested that social media were to be managed through what they called *governance* (through training, production of guidelines, and monitoring activities) to better coordinate activities with organizational goals. In the universities, social media were managed similarly to the governance concept, although, as the translations showed, related to but inconsistently operated in relation to the strategic communication framework. Thus, when Macnamara and Zerfass (2012, p. 303) identify social media as “experimental and ad hoc, rather than strategically planned”, and Linke and Zerfass (2013, p. 271) call for “social governance of social media”, I understand current uses as the result of the institutional conditions, rather than as problems of communication management. What the study supports is that strategy in communication is emergent and that the notion of control cannot be approached from a rational-managerial perspective and communication as a tool in the hands of managers (c.f., Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Sandhu, 2009). Even though conventional aspects of strategic communication strongly influence the use of social media, the local practices showed a broad range of diversity and differences. Thus, what the case of social media and the neo-institutional perspective reveals is the advantages of broadening the theoretical approaches in the development and understanding of strategic communication.

## Epilogue

Although organizations communicate in similar ways, the content and shape of their communication activities differ, not only between organizations but within organizations as well. Communicators are Lindy Hop dancers sharing the same dance floor, listening to the same Swing; while dancing together, they are also dancing alone. Socially constructed and institutionalized ideas

and norms inform the dancers of the appropriate moves of strategic communication. The university dancers danced in a shared social environment consisting of shared rules, ideas, and norms for the steps on the dance floor (c.f., Scott, 2014). The music, steps and moves are the strategic communication recipe that is brought into the organizational settings and onto the dance floor via different carriers that attend, highlight or downplay aspects of the music and the dance differentially (c.f., Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002; Scott, 2003). While on the dance floor, the communicators engage in a re-contextualization of the music and dance, and while dancing they continuously engage in negotiations, resistance, and reformulations of the recipe (c.f., Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996).

I initially presented an illustrative example for which the use and role of Instagram in AU presented inconsistencies in its management. To understand the inconsistent uses of the account in relation to a conventional perspective would most likely describe them in terms of insufficient or bad communication management (c.f., Hallahan et al., 2007; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015b). If approaching the role of Instagram from its institutional conditions, we would instead reorient the attention from a top-down to an inclusive perspective whereby the voices of all communicators are recognized as a natural and unavoidable part of the strategic communication of organizations. Everyone is dancing to the same music but dancing alone.



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# Appendices



## Appendix 1. 17 Interviews at 16 Universities (Spring 2014)

Date	Name	Position, university	Appearing in chapter	Active Blog	URL (June 2015)
31/1	Ingrid Persson	Communication Director (Com. Dir.), Linnæus University	5	No	-
6/2	Dan Guttker	Management communicator, Karlstad University	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://rektorsblogg.kau.se">http://rektorsblogg.kau.se</a>
10/2	Pernilla Björk	Com. Dir., Uppsala University	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://rektorsbloggen.uu.se">http://rektorsbloggen.uu.se</a>
19/2	Mariethe Larsson	Com. Dir., Linköping University	5	No	-
20/2	Annica Snäll	Com. Dir., University of Skövde	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="https://sigbrittkarlsson.wordpress.com">https://sigbrittkarlsson.wordpress.com</a>
27/2	Ann-Charlotte Hansson Schützer; Martina Sjövind	Management communicator; web-editor, University of Gothenburg	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://rektor.blogg.gu.se">http://rektor.blogg.gu.se</a>
28/2	Björn Brorström	VC, University of Borås	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://brorstrom.blogspot.se">http://brorstrom.blogspot.se</a>
28/2	Ann-Christin Andreasson	Com. Dir., University of Borås	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://brorstrom.blogspot.se">http://brorstrom.blogspot.se</a>
6/3	Peter Gudmundson	VC, KTH Royal Institute of Technology	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://www.kth.se/blogs/rektor/">http://www.kth.se/blogs/rektor/</a>
12/3	Astrid Söderbergh Widding; Sofie Mauritzon	VC; Com. Dir., Stockholm University	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://rektorsblogg.su.se">http://rektorsblogg.su.se</a>
14/3	Anna Andersson Ax	Management communicator, Mälardalen University	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://rektorsblogg.mdh.se">http://rektorsblogg.mdh.se</a>
24/3	Kicki Strandh	Com. Dir., Mid Sweden University	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://wpress.miun.se/rektorsblogg/">http://wpress.miun.se/rektorsblogg/</a>
28/3	Ulrika Frick Lang	Com. Dir., Umeå University	5	No	-
22/4	Jonas Andersson; Lars Uhlin	Press secretary; communication	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://rektor.blogg.lu.se">http://rektor.blogg.lu.se</a>

		strategist, Lund University			
23/4	Stefan Bengtsson	VC, Malmö University	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="http://www.blogg.mah.se/rektor/">http://www.blogg.mah.se/rektor/</a>
20/5	Tina Zethraeus	Com. Dir., Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences	5 & 6	Yes	<a href="https://blogg.slu.se/rektor/">https://blogg.slu.se/rektor/</a>
22/5	Jens Schollin	VC, Örebro University	5	No	-



## Appendix 2. Actors of Fieldwork at AU and CU<sup>36</sup>

	<b>Organizational membership and/or title/role</b>	<b>Method of study</b>
<b>Andromeda University</b>		
Ingo	University management (UM), Vice-Chancellor	Formal interview, observations
Emma	UM, communication strategist	Formal/informal interviews, observations
Maria	Communication department (CD), Communication Director	Interview, observations
Maja	CD, communicator/social media specialist (“guru”)	Formal/informal Interviews, observations
Alma	CD, communicator/social media “stand-in”	Formal/informal Interviews, observations
Carolina	CD, communicator/social media “stand-in”	Formal/informal Interviews, observations
Fredrik	CD, communicator/internal communication	Informal interview, observations
Erik	CD, press secretary	Formal interview
Mikaela	Student	Formal interview
Victoria	Student	Formal interview
Olle	Non-central administration (NCA), student life coordinator	Formal/informal interview, observations
Annika	NCA, responsible for student introduction	Formal interview
David	NCA, student introduction	Formal interview
John	NCA, coordinator/external relations	Formal interview
Pernilla	NCA, alumni coordinator	Formal interview
Helena	NCA, study counselor	Formal interview
Margit	University library, communicator	Formal interview
Janina	NCA, communicator at department	Formal interviews
Minna	NCA, teacher/communicator	Formal interview
Lisa	NCA, study counselor	Formal interview
Peter	NCA, professor	Formal interview
<b>Centaurus University</b>		
Robin	UM, Vice-Chancellor	Formal interview
Anders	UM, University director	Formal interview
Inger	UM, Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Formal interview
Kerstin	CD, Communication director	Formal/informal interviews, observations
Anna-Maria	CD, management communicator	Formal/informal interviews, observations
Sandra	CD, communicator social media specialist	Formal/informal interviews,

<sup>36</sup> All names are changed to protect privacy.

	("guru")	observations
Eva	CD, student recruitment/ communicator, social media specialist	Formal/informal interviews, observations
Elin	CD, student recruitment/ communicator, social media specialist	Formal/informal interviews
Pia	Student	Formal interview
Paola	Student	Formal interview
Ondrej	Student	Formal interview
Linda	CD, communicator	Formal/informal interviews
Ronja	CD, communicator	Formal interview
Märta	CD, communicator/alumni relations	Formal interviews
Gabriella	CD, communicator	Formal interview
Sonja	CD, communicator	Formal interview
Ella	CD, communicator	Formal interview
Hanna	CD, press secretary	Formal interview
Patrick	CD, press secretary	Formal interview
Per	CD, press secretary	Formal interview
Pablo	NCA, communicator at faculty	Formal interview
Monica	NCA, communicator at faculty	Formal interview
Selva & Mareike	NCA, communicators at faculty	Formal interview
Alexandra	NCA, communicator at department	Formal interview
Lotta	NCA, communicator at department	Formal interview
Jessica	NCA, communicator at faculty	Formal interview
Tania	Consultant, social media expert	Formal interview

## Appendix 3. The 16 Swedish Universities of the Sector Interviews<sup>37</sup>

	Number of students	Established (as university)
Andromeda University (AU) – young and small	<20 000	<20 years as a university
Centaurus University (CU) – old and large	>30 000	> 40 years as a university
<b>Universities represented in the “sector interviews”, according to age/size:</b>		
<i>Old/large</i>		
University of Gothenburg (GU)	37000	1954
Linköping University (LIU)	27000	1975
Lund University (LU)	42000	1666
Stockholm University (SU)	28000	1878
Umeå University (UMU)	32000	1965
Uppsala University (UU)	43000	1477
<i>Old/small</i>		
KTH Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)	13000	1827
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)	3745	1977
<i>Young/large</i>		
Linnæus University (LNU)	32000	1999
Malmö University (MAH)	24000	1998 (as university college)
<i>Young/small</i>		
Karlstad University (KAU)	16000	1999
Mid Sweden University (MIUN)	14000	2005
Mälardalen University (MDH)	15000	1977 (as university college)
University of Borås (HIB)	12000	1977 (as university college)
University of Skövde (HIS)	3696	1977 (as university college)
Örebro University (ÖRU)	15000	1999

<sup>37</sup> Number are approximate, and retrieved from the universities' homepages (accessed 20170831).

## Appendix 4. Interview Guide (Spring 2014)

### **Intervjuteman, och -frågor till rektorer, kommunikationsdirektörer och ledningskommunikatörer**

- Vilken är din roll på universitetet, och hur kan du beskriva den?
- Vad är kommunikationens roll i och för ett universitet?
- Ska universitet arbeta med kommunikation, varför?
- Hur arbetar ni med kommunikation?
  
- Vilka sociala medier använder ni?
- Vad är sociala medier?
- Vilken roll har sociala medier på universitetet?
- Finns det någon koppling mellan sociala medier och universitetets övergripande kommunikationsarbete?
- Finns det riktlinjer för sociala medier?
- Hur ska sociala medier användas?
- Vem sköter det operativa ansvaret av sociala medier?
- Vem är ansvarig för sociala medier?
- Finns det exempel på andra universitet eller organisationer som du tycker använder sociala medier på ett bra sätt?

### **Om rektorsblogg var aktiv på universitetet:**

- Vad är rektors roll som kommunikatör på ett universitet?
- Varför finns det en rektorsblogg - vad är dess mål?
- Vad skrivs i bloggen?
- Hur planeras innehåll
- Vem uppdaterar bloggen, varför och hur?
- Finns det riktlinjer för bloggen?

## Appendix 5. 14 Active Vice-Chancellor Blogs and 1326 posts (2011-2012)

University, author (title)	Active period	Posts
Mid Sweden University, Anders Söderholm (Vice-Chancellor)	2011 Jan – 2012 Dec	245
Stockholm University, Kåre Bremer (VC)	2011 Jan – 2012 Dec	225
Lund University, Per Eriksson (VC), Eva Åkesson (deputy VC, <2012) and Eva Wiberg (deputy VC, >2012)	2011 Jan – 2012 Dec	218
Uppsala University, Eva Åkesson (VC) and Anders Malmberg (deputy VC)	2012 Jan – 2012 Dec	164
Mälardalen University, Karin Röding (VC)	2011 Apr – 2012 Dec	120
KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Peter Gudmundson (VC)	2011 Jan – 2012 Dec	88
Malmö University, Stefan Bengtsson (VC)	2011 Aug – 2012 Dec	85
University of Borås, Björn Brorström (VC)	2011 Oct – 2012 Dec	64
Karlstad University, Åsa Bergenheim (VC)	2011 Nov – 2012 Dec	34
University of Skövde, Sigbritt Karlsson (VC)	2012 Jan – 2012 Dec	33
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Lisa Sennerby Forsse (VC), Torbjörn von Schantz (deputy VC) and Lena Andersson-Eklund (Vice- rektor)	2012 Aug – 2012 Dec	19
Umeå University, Kjell Jonsson (deputy VC)	2011 May – 2012 Sep	16
Blekinge Institute of Technology, Ursula Hass (VC)	2010 Jan-2012 Feb	8
University of Gothenburg, Pam Fredman (VC)	2012 Jun – 2012 Jul (the blog commenced operating in July 2013)	7



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