How employees use internet as a medium of communication and how it affects interpersonal business-to-business (B2B relationship) creation and building?

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Abstract

In this research we are evaluating how internet affects interpersonal business relationships. We have noticed that the existing literature that touches upon internet’s effects are mainly concerned with “that” and “what” internet affects. What we want to study is ”how” internet affects and in this study, how employees use internet as a medium and how internet affects interpersonal business relationship creation and building. This study is driven by our own curiosity as we want to learn more about this field as we will most probably come across it later in our careers. The study was conducted through a comparative case study design where the data was gathered through interviews with seven individuals who uses internet in their working life to communicate with customers. The interviews allowed us to see that internet was used in different ways and that the communication had different aims.

We adopted the thematic analysis method when analyzing our data and found that internet’s effect on business relationships differed between different branches. It also became evident that different individuals used it to different degrees when it came to actually creating and building relationships with the medium.

From our finding we can conclude that: Internet does affect interpersonal business relationship creation and building but the effect might be both positive and negative depending on the user of the medium. The change inflicted on the business relationships by internet was also dependent on the line of business.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this research we seek to evaluate the implications of internet as a communication medium in business relationship creation and building within Business-to-business (B2B) relations. Internet has developed fast and it is still changing rapidly, one of the areas that has been affected by it is the way business people make contact and establish relationships with each other. While it is certain that internet is beneficial in many aspects for businesses, there is little empirical research on how the individuals who has adopted internet in their working environment experience it when they use it for creation and building relationships. With this research want to contribute to this area and evaluate, from the view of individuals using internet in their working environment, what affect the medium has when it is used to create and build business relationships.

Internet, being a quite recent addition in the world of business, as compared to other mediums of communication and information, as well as affecting many parts in the different processes of conducting businesses. These range from everything from communicating and exchange of data to being a part of the production-lines as well as incorporated in many products.

The big implication on many stages also means that there are as many views on how and when it should be used as there are users. This for us, makes it an interesting field of study. Both of the authors have been born and brought up during the “internet era” and are constantly using it in various ways in our daily life. Being business students and also seeing how it becomes more and more implemented in the business world it is especially interesting for us as we both expect to come in contact with internet as a communication medium in our future careers. These are also the main reasons for us to conduct this study.

1.1 Background

Since internet is such a new aspect of the business environment there are numerous gaps in the research and explanation of its usage and implication. Halinen and Möller (1999) examined 10 different articles in an attempt to cover “the core issues in managing business networks and relationships”, (Halinen & Möller, 1999, p. 425), that has arisen with these new technological means. From their investigation they identifies a lack of research of internet’s role in, among others, networking between businesses. Salo (2007) notes that literature and research in the electronic commerce has indeed been done, however much of this research has concerned market and hierarchy governance mechanisms, while research regarding business relationships have become under prioritized leaving gaps in this field of research (Salo, 2007, p.489). The research done by Salo follows the relationship between two companies and how their interaction changes with implementation electronic mediums for communication and to conducting business. From the results it is concluded that the implementation have had beneficial effects for both parties (Salo, 2007, p.498). However, it is also noted that in the beginning all contact was made through traditional mediums (p. 495) and that the movement from traditional to electronic mediums for conducting business and communicating would not have been possible without an underlying strong relationship in the bottom (p. 497).
His findings points towards that even with beneficial results from implementing electronically based practices and communication it is not always an option if the interpersonal relationships are not sound in the foundation.

In this research we strive to investigate one of the gaps related to this, namely how internet affects interpersonal business relationships between individuals working in different companies. Newman, A et al. (2005, p. 46) defines business relationships as a constitution based on two levels, which follows:

“Business-to-business (B2B) relationships operate on two levels: the interorganisational relationship between the buying and selling firms (firm-to-firm), and the interpersonal relationship between the two firms’ representatives (individual-to-individual). The latter is the primary conduit through which firms communicate, negotiate, and influence each other. The actions and decisions of these individuals determine the strength and structure of the relationship between the two firms.”

Going from this concept we can see that our question focus on the level of interpersonal relationships between the individuals which is also the level where the strength of a relationship is formed.

However, the results presented by Salo (2007) also show that basic levels of benefits compared to risks are required for the medium of choice when communicating. It also shows that these benefits and risks may vary between different mediums and users. Internet, as a relatively new medium as compared to letters or phone and especially as introduced into a new environment must therefore be able to yield greater benefits than risks. As such it is also of importance for this study to also begin by looking at the different communication-mediums, as well as a defining the interpersonal relationship on which we want to see the medium’s affect.

1.1.1 Internet and Trust

One thing that has been recurring in the previous researches of internet and business relationship is the concept of trust. Jiang et.al (2011) argues that trust is an important part of a relationship but that it appears between individuals solely and not between corporations. This research highlights that it is a difference between relationships made between corporations compared to those made between people. We share this view and our assumption is that the interpersonal relationships might be affected separately from those between corporations.

Building forward on the importance of trust and inserting it in the internet environment are Jevons et. al. (2000) who discusses how trust and also why trust on the internet is necessary. According to Jevons (2000), organizations and corporations have been more or less pushed into accepting the use of internet in order to keep up with competition. One of the main reasons for this is that consumer consciousness has begun to increase. Consumers, whether they are individuals or representing corporations, have access to much more information and are able to better compare prices, qualities and offers than before. This has also sprung a new attitude pattern where personal “know-how” is one of the things salesman has to face, argue with, and convince.

Since internet was introduced it has become the worlds largest bank of information, and it is expanding more for each day. As we perceive it, one of the biggest reason for this is its fast growth is the fact that internet is being developed on so many frontiers by so
many users at the same time. All internet-users have the possibility to change it; also, when a change is being made it becomes available to all users instantly which avoid the possibility of multiple minds being occupied with the same development. The integration of all users connected together also means that the compiled competences from all users is possible to reach instantly by anyone, meaning that internet can be considered one of the world’s biggest sources of information, a good example of this a web-forum. A simple definition of a web-forum is “a website or section of a website that allows visitors to communicate with each other by posting messages” (Tech Terms, 2011). To show a good example of the width of a large web forum we can mention “Flashback”, a Swedish web-forum where anyone is able to pose a question about anything. Each time a new question is asked it is put in its own “thread”. A thread is much like a title which users than can click on and present their answer to the question. The threads also help the site to categorize it into different groups which eases navigation for interested readers and responders to stay within their field of interest. As of April 2012 Flashback has over 630 000 registered users and over 35 000 000 posted questions and answers (Flashback, 2012). A good example of how knowledge can be spread through internet.

By allowing people to search for information on their own they are also able to find out more information regarding products and services before contacting the firm who provides them. Through forums, like the earlier mentioned Flashback, they are also able to gain opinions regarding certain products or services before actually trying them out for themselves. This can lead to customers avoiding or deciding on a specific service or product based on specific features without knowing all aspects of the object. We think that occurrences like these can, and probably are happening and that they may lead to customers not even considering certain merchandise although these might, in reality be better suited for their needs.

Jevons et. al (2000), beside touching upon trust in business relationship and that it must be communicated accurately, also shows that internet have other uses for corporations than only being a mean of direct communication and relationship building between two parties. In this case it shows that internet can also be used to gain information from outside parties. We support this view and in order to find out how internet affect business relationships we also need to show that it is indeed used for business relationship creation and not only within other possible areas.

1.1.2 Internet in Business Communication

In order to conduct business, communication both internally and externally is vital for success. Business continuance relies on interaction between two or more parties, and to ensure that both achieve a desirable outcome from the relationship. Thus, understanding what the desired outcomes are from both parties is important in order to ensure that the parties are working together towards the goals that have been agreed upon with the partnership (Johanson et al, 2003, p.93). Misunderstandings in these goals can in the worst case terminate a relationship with negative feelings for both parties. Ensuring that these goals are interpreted correctly and that the relationship is sustained is among the major parts of communication. Internet is a new form of communication and it is our view that individuals experience it and uses it in different ways. Hence, it is also important to know if they perceive that the internet is able to transmit information that is correct.
Since the introduction of the World Wide Web, more commonly referred to as “internet”, it has become a relevant, growing part within the business sector (Fay Sudweeks, Celia T. Romm, 1999, p.1). In the beginning, internet was being used to spread data concerning stock values over far distances. Today it is being used as a main-platform for many companies operations, being used both internally for communication and organization, and externally with the addition of relationship creation and building, market for goods and services and usage as a global information center (Brett A. Boyle, 2001, p. 460-461).

Technology has now gone even further allowing companies to use real-time video conferences and interviews as well as making contract agreements. Indeed, the development of this technology has proceeded at an impressive speed. As comparison to other communication devices through time such as the telephone which took over half a century to acquire over 50 million users or the radio which reached the same amount of population after 34 years. Internet in comparison required only 4 years reaching the same amount of users and although one must admit that the population on earth had grown much larger together with a bigger portion of it having a good welfare, the growth is still impressive (Human Papers on Public Policy, 1999, p. 1).

Instant Messaging (IM), as one example is a peer-to-peer service for remote users to communicate with each others. This medium enables the parties to write back and forth to each other, usually with short messages of about a sentence at a time, in real time. Making the communication more like a “spoken” rather than “written” communication method. There are several programs that are used for IM today. The increasing popularity of real time communications through online channels has made IM grow exponentially (Hui, S.C et al. 2008, p.411). Currently there are 900 million users solely on Facebook Messenger (Messenger, 2016).

While business and relationship-creation today is theoretically able to be conducted entirely in the virtual world companies still places themselves in clusters (Florida, 2005). Florida (2005) argues that this is because physical closeness offers benefits not available in the virtual world such as economies of scale and knowledge spillover (Florida, 2005, p. 50). It also allows for workers bonding and interaction with each other outside their working environment. The article illustrates benefits gained through physical closeness for the company’s point of view, but whether these benefits are desirable for the individual working with relationships within the company is not discussed. This is also one of the reasons for this study.

In their book “The Experience Economy” (2011) Pine and Gillmore argues that we are moving away from the information society and into a new “experience economy”, meaning that although more is getting automated there will still be an increasing need for human labor. This is because people are searching for increasing trust when doing business but also wants to experience more connection with their purchase. An example of this by the author that we like to mention is Apple’s Apple stores. Allowing people to experience their products in an optimal environment while also offering on-location support and guidance has become one of Apple’s big selling points. The authors argue that physical experiences such as these are one of the appealing things that internet networks and relationships are lacking.
1.1.3 Internet’s Effect on Communication

In a recent thesis written by Jara and Wayburne (2011) the authors set out to examine how internet based networking communities can be used by entrepreneurs in order to widen their networks. They found that internet communities indeed could serve as good means of establishing new contacts but that relationships created this way usually created cold and fragile ties mainly used for advices and tips. It does however show that internet has potential for establishing and building relationships.

As seen above there are articles that highlight certain areas touched by internet and relationship building. However, while this is true, companies still uses physical and more traditional approaches to establish relationships both business-to-business and business-to-consumers.

One of these traditional mediums is the telephone communication, a communication today more conducted through mobile telephone. In today’s society there is a growing use of technology for accessing information and mediating communication. There has never been a stronger spread of mobile and internet technologies application throughout the history. Over the last two decades information and technology communication has been a key factor for the economic growth all over the world. Since the invention of the internet the mobile phone has taken a significantly up going trend. One might find a mobile phone in a remote village somewhere in a developing country, something that may not be the same for access to the internet (Katz, James E. 2008, p.15). This had lead easier communication for people all round the world. As of today the mobile phone has become an essential part of our lives. Viewed before as a luxury item with high status symbol the mobile phone is now considered a necessity by most people (Katz, James E. 2008, p.285).

Before the use of more modern communication methods people used to write the written word on a piece of paper. In business the letter was used to communicate formal matters and jurisprudence. This is to some degree still used today. (Bly, Robert W. 1999, p. 21).

Another traditional medium is the facsimile or better known as Fax. The arrival of the Fax drastically changed the pace of the business communications. In businesses before the fastest way to communicate was through overnight express mail. However, most of the business then used the normal telephone line for instant information exchange. Every worker in the workplace was not equipped with a fax machine but there was a few around the offices (Bly, Robert W. 1999, p. 21). This led the workers to send over papers to sign and other work related papers that have otherwise been sent through normal mail. This made the communication much faster than ever before.

Going to internet, another article that touches upon the impact of internet is presented by Kietzmann, et. all (2001). In the article the authors examine the implications of social media. From the findings it is apparent that many different platforms of social media’s exists, Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn etc. (p. 242). It can also be said that these are profiled and have different reasons for existing. Facebook and Twitter as an example is focused to people’s everyday life and enables user to “show” status in life, current mindset or activities that are being undertaken While others like LinkedIn are more oriented to share professional-related merits and come in contact with different professional groups (Kietzmann. 2001 p245). Blog and review-sites enable millions of
people to share views on products, places and companies. And opinions are able to spread fast as a site with attractive content can attract the same millions of people to see it in one day (Kietzmann. 2001 p242).

Hence it is apparent from this research that being active and showing a “good side” in the relevant social medias is of big importance to firms of today as negative feedback on the wrong community can lead to complications for the firms themselves and spread fast over big groups of people.

Papadopoulou et. al (2001) mentions that “In e-commerce, the physical-to-virtual transfer of commercial activity forces us to rethink the ways traditional rules for building trust and loyalty” (p. 324). This sentence tells us that internet affects relationships. What we hope is that this study will help us to see “how” internet does affect them.

In this sense it seems that internet has the ability to affects trust and relationships. However, these theories rely on the fact that businesses are using the internet for these purposes. Although corporations may claim they use internet to conduct businesses it is not certain that it is used for interpersonal business relationship building. And even if it is used in relationship building, it can be used in different ways with different goals. There are also material that indicates that the traditional “physical” contact between business relationships is still important and brings benefits.

From what have been previously mentioned we can say that internet seems to affect business relationships in a number of ways. The earlier studies presented focuses on proving “that” relationships are affected by internet, however, as of today there is no real theory or model available that explain “how” it affects them. From what have been studied, trust have been one of the things that may be most affected with the introduction of internet, however, these results rely on the assumption that people who uses internet in business relationship building are using it as a mean to actually gain trust as well. From what we have found this is something that has not been explored by earlier researchers.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

In our study we like to bring these issues to the surface and evaluate how people using the internet for contacting, and stay in contact with, clients in B2B-arrangements think and feel about using internet. And also “how” they are using it as a medium in comparison to other, more traditional, means (telephone, letters, meetings etc). Thus, this thesis will be created around the point of views from users and what they believe are the differences that internet as a medium creates.

Examining this through hypotheses, as has earlier been done, by Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) for example, when examining the effects of internet only enable us to confirm and reject specific hypotheses.

By doing a qualitative research we will enable the interviewees to answer questions in their own words. Our opinion is that feelings are not either acceptable or reject-able but different for all individuals and that, by allowing the respondents to answer the questions by themselves, they will be able to more accurately convey their thoughts. We
want to know these individual differences in how people use internet as a medium and how it might affect interpersonal business relationships.

Thus we present the following question:

*How employees use internet as a medium of communication and how it affects interpersonal business-to-business (B2B relationship) creation and building?*

In order to answer it is also required that we know “how” and for “what” internet is used within corporations.

### 1.3 Delimitation:

It does not seek to study internet itself but rather how internet affects the interpersonal business relationship and creation in different companies. This study takes focus on the individual and how the employees use the medium and how it affects the business relationships creation and building. Since this study is a case study we do not aim to do any generalization in our conclusion.

We have limited this study to few companies rather than select a wide range of companies. This is due to the time limit we had when conducting this research. Another limit is also that our study is focused on the individual users and do not wish to see whole companies opinions about our subject, but rather the personal opinions.

### 1.4 Search for Sources

The sources for this thesis were gathered through the universities own library. Both physical books as well as books and research papers online. Internet was our main source of information in this thesis. The use of internet as main source for gathering sources meant that we had a fast access to a wide variety of sources.

### 1.5 Definition of Concepts

In this section we present the main key concepts along with our own definition of the same within this research.

Internet Communication: Communication conducted between individuals through internet, involving chat, mail, and

Interpersonal business-to-business (B2B) relationships: Relationships between people representing different businesses.

Trust: Trust in interpersonal relationships is a measure of “belief” that the other party will commit to his agreements. It also measures how much “faith” the people involved have in each other.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this study we are interested in how internet affects business relationships for those affected. As we mentioned before this is an area which is quite unexplored which means that the amount of literature related to our subject is small. We have however, managed to find some material which will help us in our research.

2.1 Literature

2.1.1 Business Relationship

In our research question we want to research how internet affects interpersonal business relationships. In order to answer the research question the authors also need to evaluate what kind of business relationships we are looking for and how they are created.

There are five main relationship formations recognized when it comes to business relationships. Dou and Chou (2002) recognizes these sections as business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C), consumer to consumer (C2C), consumer-to-business (C2B), and intra-organizational e-commerce but the authors are going are focusing solely on business-to-business. This is because of two main reasons; the authors believe that relationships in the business-to-business section generally incorporates more work into a long time relationship as compared to the other business relationships. Secondly this area interest us more as both have less experience of the business-to-business field than the other two and we wish to broaden our knowledge in this field.

Why should companies choose to enter in a business-to-business relation? Cann (1998) argues that business-to-business relations are desirable when the benefits exceed the risk of having the business relationship. In order to create a long term business relationship both companies needs to gain from the situation. It can be experience, knowledge, services or creating advantages in their own field. Business relationships are essential in every business, connecting an actor to its suppliers, customers and partners (Humphries, A, Gibbs, R, Humphries, A. 2015. p.xiii).

There are two different kinds of business relationships in terms of the “length” of the relationship. There are short term and long term relationships. A business relationship between two companies is often developed when one company needs to buy/order or need something from the other company. When a company buys a product or service from a company once or a few times it’s considered being a short term relationship (Blois, 2009).

Blois (2009) discussed that in a short term relationship it is not uncommon for one of the companies to be perceived as a more powerful business over the other company. This company has more power when it comes to prices and making a business contract. Blois (2009) discuss further that this kind of relationship only works when it is a short term relationship between the companies.

From what Blois (2009) argue the authors draw the conclusion that it is less need for any kind of commitment in a short term relationship. As the authors see it, in order to build a strong and reliable business relationship there need to be commitment from both
of the parties in order for it to work properly. If there is no commitment there will be less trust between the two companies. In order for a strong and reliable relationship to work in the long run, there also need to be mutual trust between the companies (The Economist Intelligence Unit. 2008, p.7-8).

A long term relationship is when a customer or a business buy something from a company many times. If both companies have benefits to gain from the partnership they will establish a business relationship. Depending on what the specific companies these benefits can vary. It can be things such as increasing satisfaction of the customer or increasing performance and profitability (Warrington et. al. 2000). Being committed to the business relationship is an important part in the upholding of the business relationship (Dwyer et. al. 1987). Since the companies are more committed in the business relationship they are more likely to build up trust between the different them Blois (2009).

In our research question there is a need to establish whether our research question will be best answered by evaluating a long term or a short term relationship. As discussed earlier in this section there is not always a need to focus on relationship building in short term relationships since there is only a transaction for a short time. Thus, the authors decided that long term relationships were better suited for our study since the interpersonal business relationship is a more important factor in this kind of relationship.

In an article made by Anderson and Weitz (1989) the authors also mentioned the element of trust. Their main goal was to establish what factors a functional long term relationships is built upon. They conducted a questionnaire with 95 different companies and they asked what kind of relationship they had with their top 8 partners. These relationships were analyzed and concluded in a model which showed the main foundations which were needed to ensure the success of a long term business relationship, one of these being trust, but also some other interesting factors as well.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Relationships Source: Anderson & Weitz 1989, p. 311
The authors think that this model is very relevant for our study since it illustrates many of the factors that the authors also find important for a successful relationship. The model also connects the different factors to each other. As a few examples presented by the model a power imbalance in a relationship there will be less trust. Also The trust will increase with communication and the support the relationship gets. Since the model connects these different factors it helps the authors in this study to aim the focus on the factors that matters. The authors do not know “how” internet affects the different factors that make up a relationship, or which factors are affected. Here, the authors again want to highlight/focus on the importance of the individual’s own perspective. With them, the authors hope to find out which different factors are affected by the usage internet for those who uses it.

2.1.2 Trust

Shankar et. al. (2010) states that committing to the business relationship has many benefits. They argued that reducing uncertainty, increasing satisfaction, performance and profitability is only a few advantages that can be made when having a good business-to-business relationship. The level of commitment has relevance to the level of trust in the business relationship and by committing to the business relationship the trust between both companies will increase (Dwyer et. al. 1987). However as Shankar et. al. (2010) argues when one of the companies misuse this trust the business relationship can backfire and all those benefits, that are previously mentioned, are lost in the process.

As seen many articles mention the area of trust as an important piece of a business relationship. The authors also recognize trust as an important piece of a relationship and thus the authors find it important to define this concept for our research. Many have studied it but there have also been many different conclusions and different definitions. However it means that there are a lot materials to be read about the subject. As previously mentioned Jiang et. al. (2011) offered a help in defining where trust acted for our study when he wrote about the difference between trust and reliance.

However, the authors also need to define trust itself. Bamberger (2010) notes that many social studies which mentioned this subject has made their own definition of this word. Bamberger (2010) recognizes this as a problem and tries to define this subject in the context of interpersonal relationships in his work “Interpersonal Trust - Attempt of a Definition”. In it he defines trust in this setting as:

“Interpersonal trust is an expectation about a future behavior of another person and an accompanying feeling of calmness, confidence, and security depending on the degree of trust and the extent of the associated risk. That other person shall behave as agreed, unagreed but loyal, or at least according to subjective expectations, although she/he has the freedom and choice to act differently, because it is impossible or voluntarily unwanted to control her/him. That other person may also be perceived as a representative of a certain group”.

This definition states that two individuals have an agreement with each other. With the faith of one or both of the individuals they create trust between each other to uphold the mentioned agreement. The essential piece in building this relationship thus relies on the fact that mutual trust for each other can emerge between them with the individuals’ having faith, as mentioned before, in upholding what they both agreed upon (Abraham, Priya E. 2015, p.211).
We share the strong view from Bamberger (2010) that interpersonal trust is an expectation from one party to another that both will behave as agreed upon and will honor the commitment to each other. We also agree with Shankar et. al. (2010) regarding that committing to a business relationship has many benefits. And that commitment it will increase satisfaction, performance and reduce uncertainty. As Dwyer et. al. (1987) we share the belief that with the increase in commitment from each party the level of trust will increase. As Abraham, Priya E. (2015) we believe that the essential piece in building a business relationship relies on the mutual trust for one another.

The authors have decided to make use of this abovementioned definition and develop it a bit further and generate our own definition which follows; “trust in interpersonal relationships is a measure of “belief” that the other party will commit to his agreements. It also measures how much “faith” the people involved have in each other”. With defining trust as a measure the authors also recognize that people are able to have more or less of it. In doing so we also recognize that there are variables that affect it.

2.1.3 Trust and Internet

In a study that studied 16 different electronic partnerships were the authors of Gallivan et. al. (2003) who researched what kind of relationship different companies had with each other and what kind of aspects highlighted their relationship. They came to the conclusion that there was a trade-off between trust and control which meant that when acting over the internet, companies needed to give each other trust by offering control to the other party in order to create and withhold a long term partnership. This conclusion however relies on the fact that the users of the internet tool perceive that one is able to gain and instill trust through the internet.

Feng (2004) conducted a study on interpersonal trust on internet. What he found was that people differ in their online and general trust and that these had no positive relationship (p. 104). This indicates that people are not able to build the same relationships online as they would in their daily life. Hence, when people switch communication from an online forum to face-to-face the level of trust might change. The author further argues that studying the effect online communication has on this daily life-trust is one of the possible further studies to be conducted. In a way this is what the authors will attempt to do, with the difference being that the focus will be on company-interpersonal relationships. This article however is important since it identifies a difference in trust on- and offline.

2.1.4 Internet:

In this section the authors will try to define what internet is, how it is used and what earlier studies have been made on the subject internet and relationships.

The internet has been around for four decades and it keeps growing all the time. Today there are approximately over two billion people using the internet according to Internet World Stats (2011). However, it is not only private people who has seen a growing integration of the internet in their everyday life, companies are also adapting it in more ways than ever before in their activities. They are handling different operations through the internet and also building business-to-business relationships between the companies. Today internet can be used to search for and also contact both persons and businesses
with the click of a finger. We are all connected through the internet (Westerbeek, Hans. Smith, Aaron. 2015, p.154). Users are also able to communicate through the internet in at any time of the day, things that before required people to be in on their offices ready to answer the phone or waiting for traditional letters or physical meetings. This will be discussed further down in the conceptual framework.

The internet is indeed a wide and unexplored field when it comes to research. At the moment we are in a phase where the internet in itself is undergoing a transformation as discussed by Bell and Loane (2010) in their article “New-wave global firms: Web 2.0 and SME Internationalization”. This change brings with it many changes in the business environment and one of the things affected the most is personal relationships. The authors argue that the internet of today is becoming outdated. Today’s internet is based on HTML, websites and other places where the “surfers” are able to acquire information. The authors argue that the new version, 2.0 is a more open form where the visitors of the site have more influence, as well as greater possibilities to customize their own products and information. Meaning that the user becomes more integrated in the process of designing new goods and services as well contribute with information. At the same time the technology develop new means of communicating by the use of online conferences and live streaming technology (Christensen, Jens. 2015, p.214).

That internet change the way people communicate, that it allows more information to be transferred and that it enables the world to shrink is well mentioned in literature. Since its introduction on the business stage, companies have been able to boost production, communicate at faster speed and achieve faster growth that was unheard of before its arrival. However, quite little focus is put on the actual user, something the authors find quite strange considering the user’s importance. In the study earlier mentioned made by Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) they are evaluating how internet affects business-to-business marketing. In their research they are testing multiple hypotheses regarding the area and reach several conclusions, one of these being that “business-to-business marketing strategies should emphasize the use of the Internet tools that promote personal and interactive communication with the customers” (Avlonitis & Karayanni, 2000, p.456). This sentence is important because it stresses the issue of using internet to maintain and build relationships.

Another thing that needs to be taken into consideration is that the individual’s relationship to internet in general differs from the young and “born” computer user to people in “the old school” used to working in the old fashion environment (Akman & Mishra, 2010, p. 488). Many companies implement internet practices collectively to better face competition, meaning that both “young” and “old” learns to adopt these new practices. Our opinion though, is that the trust that different people put in these tools can differ.

Business on internet, being the new technology as it is, does not come without problems. Bradshaw and Brash (2001) discusses a few of these in their article “Managing customer relationships in the e-business world: how to personalise computer relationships for increased profitability”. Their view is that “Companies which work only on consistency across the channels can end up offering a very clinical customer experience which, although it will be praised for its efficiency, is unlikely to develop customer loyalty” (Bradshaw & Brash, 2001, p. 528), this being due to the lack of “personalisation”. Personalisation, is the ability to customize the product or service for the customer’s needs.
The study was conducted through a quantitative way using surveys done on 114 United Kingdom situated corporations in different businesses where the authors posed as potential customers. The argument for conducting the study is that the authors fear that companies do not utilize these new technological tools to their full potential, causing them to lose the ability to customize their services and products to the customers’ needs. From the result of the study the authors conclude that although internet is developed to increase availability and efficiency in the businesses communication between themselves and their customers it rather does the opposite, much due to the companies not using the technology efficiently.

Since this article was published 15 years have passed and one thing that we want to find out is whether or not the people working with internet today find it as an effective tool when the use it within business relationships.

The authors reckon that for users to make use of this new technology they must also perceive that it is more effective than other traditional mediums. The authors also think that presenting more efficient, functional working practices to customers will raise the trust and feeling of professionalism from the company. Returning back to the previous mentioned by Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) we would like to point out a few of the results from their study. In their research the authors tested multiple hypotheses with varying results. Two of these that were confirmed were that: “the sales management activities examined in this study would have a positive impact on sales performance.” (Alonitis & Karayanni, 2000, p.449). Within the study the authors define sales management activities as “activities referring to customer classification and market segmentation, as well as targeting, selling, service, and retention of existing customers.”(Alonitis & Karayanni, 2000, p.445). Hence, this implies that communication with customers through internet will affect the performance of sales and retaining customers, thus it may have implications on the trust built on communication through internet. Another thing they concluded was that the sales management activities would have a positive impact on sales efficiency (Alonitis & Karayanni, 2000, p.449). From these results we can assume that internet does affect the efficiency of doing business as well as potentially positively improve selling performance and retention of customers. Hence these results support the foundation of our research question, we know that internet affects relationships, we do not however, know how.

In an article made by Gimenez (2000) the author is presenting emerging trends in e-mail communication. As a relatively young medium as compared to physical letters or the telephone, emails started to become more integrated as a medium of communication in the early 1990’s (Gimenez, 2000, p.250) it is one of the main IT-based communication methods of today. One of the more relevant results from this article for our study is that, according to the author the written communication in e-mail shows more similarity to the spoken communication than that of physical letters (Gimenez, p. 239). Much of this is due to the characteristics that separate the written and spoken languages and comparing these to the characteristics of email communication. Gimenez mentions a few of the ones shared by the spoken and email language as being simple, informal, containing personal abbreviations and following few guidelines.

The rate at which emails can be sent or received together yields emails as a medium the advantage over written letters to be more efficient. Also, by the trends shown by
Gimenez, the personal and more informal way of expressing oneself in writing have also started to affect how business relationships are created (2000, p.249).

We will ask our interviewees about the effectiveness they feel they gain from using internet and hope to find out how, if any, this affects the business relationships from their point of view.

2.1.5 Internet Communication

In our research question we mentioned that we aim to evaluate “how internet” affects an interpersonal business relationship. However in order to do this we also need to define what features of the internet we are talking about as “affecting” variables.

As of today internet is being used for many different tasks besides interpersonal communication. For example its users can track packages they ordered (UPS, 2012) also companies can use inventory system to track their inventory (Management-HUB, 2012). Indeed their area of use is wide even within the walls of a single entity.

Although there are many features users of the internet can use today for this study the authors want to focus on its communicative features but even here there are many different methods. Those methods are electronic mail (generally referred to as e-mail or simply just mail), instant messaging and video conference. These different communication features are discussed below.

Mail, is one of the more basic uses for communication through internet and it basically works like a the traditional mail that you get in your mailbox outside your door, the difference being that the time for sending, sorting and delivering are removed (Tech Terms, 2012). Another difference is also that except from regular written and visual content a mail can contain sound and movies without the use of physical mediums as discs or USB-sticks. It allows for fast sharing of information and the information remains in his or her inbox until the receiver opens it as well as afterwards if the reader wants to review the contents later. However, since you do not really speak directly to the other party one is unable to read things such as tone of voice and the information must be written so that it is interpreted in the way the sender wishes it to be. As such it bears a risk of misinterpretation, it also requires the receiving party to actually check his/hers inbox on regular basis in order to not fall behind in updated information.

A second method of communicating through internet is instant messaging, often referred to as chatting. Today there are many software’s developed for this purpose, an example is msn-messenger which is quite renowned within this field. Whitcomb, Alan (2016) describes instant messaging working through short text messages written by the sender to the receiver, usually just one or a few sentences at a time. The receiver then instantly see this message popping up on his own screen and is able to instantly respond through the same procedure. The method is fast and allows for misunderstandings and misinterpretations to be corrected and cleared out instantly allowing for the information to be accurate for the receiver. However since it is communication in real-time it requires both parties to be online at the same time, something that can be cumbersome, especially if the parties are in different time zones. The current conversation can usually be reviewed but usually once a conversation ends the written discussion is lost.

The third option is fairly new and we can thank much of its possibilities thanks to the expansion of faster internet connections. This is video-conferencing. Whitcomb, Alan
(2016) describes video conferencing as utilizing cameras and microphones, which allows the participants to view each other and speak directly through their microphones as if they were situated right next to each other. The direct communication allows for the same benefits as a regular phone-call, adding to this the ability to see the speaker allows for the watcher to read the speaker’s body-language in a way that has not been possible before. Newer software for this use also allows multiple people to participate at the same time meaning that real-time meetings can take place in this manner. It still however, like with instant messaging requires all parties to be present at the time of the event.

When the authors speak of internet communication throughout this thesis the authors refer to communication made through any of these above mentioned ways of communication over internet.

In the literature review we first presented articles concerning business relationship, here we speak about the different kind of business relationships there are and also about the foundations that enable a business relationship to be built. The authors found numerous indications that especially “trust” was one of the main cornerstones in relationships, which led us to deeper into this in the following section for information. From these we wanted to know what was known about internet in business relationships, and how it came to affect these. Following we wanted to get a better view of internet itself and what studies had been done on the subject and finally how it has affected the ways of communication.

2.1.6 Relevant Research Theories and Methods

For this research there are a number of research theories and methods that will be applied to in the end yield a result. In this section we will mention them shortly before presenting and apply them further on in the research.

Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) quantitative research showed us that internet did in fact affect interpersonal business relationships but they did not find out how, which is our focus in this research. As Bell & Bryman (2007) argues that a qualitative study will yield more depths in the respondent's answer something that would otherwise be lost when conducting a quantitative study. Considering this we will be doing a qualitative study in order to answer the question which focuses on answering “how” internet as a medium affects relationship creation and building.

In the research, data is going to be collected through interviews. The interviews will be semi-structured. This is one of the ways of doing qualitative interviews presented by Saunders, M et. al. (2009), and enables the interviewees to respond in their own words. According to another research made by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) more qualitative focused interviews can yield data not available by quantitative methods.

The research design we will used is comparative case study. This reason is based from Viisak (2010) who argues that comparative case study is beneficial when exploring a field where there is little previous knowledge.

When analyzing the data collected in our research we are going to apply the thematic analysis method as presented by Braun & Clarke (2006). This method is beneficial for our research as it is designed to study patterns from qualitative data based on people's
experiences. As mentioned, the studies and theories mentioned above in this section will be further explained later in the research.

2.1.7 Literature Critic

In search for sources for the literature review we used keywords such as; relationships, communication, business-to-business, internet and closely related to this. We also used different research journals where we know that the content has been reviewed beforehand and therefore make it a more reliable source to use. This enables us to find more information towards our research subject.

The authors have consciously chosen to only use empirical accepted sources within the literature review as this increases the validity for our methods and findings. This meant staying away from open forums and views posted on social media since the information is not reviewed in an empirical way.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

In the following section we will present the main concepts of our research. We will also shortly mention what data will be used, how it will be collected and finally how it will be analyzed. A deeper explanation of this as well as the considerations for the chosen methods will be further presented in chapter 3.

2.2.1 Traditional Mediums

Before the modern communications methods were available people used to write the written word on a piece of paper. In businesses the letter was used to write up contract or send formal information to one another which otherwise could not be said over the phone (Bly, Robert W. 1999, p. 21). As Bly, Robert W (1999) we agree that there is some usage of the written letter today. However, every day we see more and more modern way to communicate formal information. The invention of Bank ID made it easier to sign contracts online and in the future we are going to see more and more of such feature which makes the written letter less useful. As the authors see it the modern ways of communications will continuously grow to become ever bigger than they are today.

The beginning of the facsimile or better known as Fax era changed the workplace drastically. Businesses that were active before the arrival of the Fax used the normal telephone and mail for the important business exchange (Bly, Robert W. 1999, p. 21). Before the arrival of the internet the fax machine was the fastest way to send written information to someone. Since the development of internet the fax machine died out as a mean of transmitting written text to someone. This is why we are focusing on the more modern ways of transmitting information in our research, like email or otherwise mobile forms of communications.

The key factor for economic growth over the last two decades has been information and communications technology. Since the introduction of the internet the mobile phone has seen a significantly growth in today’s different markets (Katz, James E. 2008, p.15). The interaction between different people has with the mobile telephone made it much easier. The mobile phone has also been a big part of the author's life growing up and still is today. We are constantly connected with other people and with a click of a button
we can connect with other people very easily. This makes it much easier to stay in touch and build relationships with different people that otherwise lived far away. As mentioned by Katz, James E (2008) we share the view that the mobile phone is an essential part of our lives. If we connect to this study we are going to use the mobile phone to get in touch with our interviewees.

2.2.2 IT-based Communication-Mediums

One of the main benefits as presented earlier with IT-based mediums is speed and the ability to come in contact with a large amount of potential business partners. The study by Kitzmann (2001) also shows that social medias through internet have been especially important to enable people to make that initial contact that earlier was preferred through traditional mediums as mentioned by Gimenez, and Salo (2000 & 2007).

Mail which also holds the benefit of speed enables users to send digital “letters” at any time in the day. Making it readable instantly for the receiver. As shown by Gimenez (2000) mail can also be made personalized where the degree of “personalisation” and informal language can impact the strength of the relationship. While these findings go against the results of Bradshaw & Brash (2001) which argued that communication thought internet resulted in lack in personalization we, based on our own experience and the earlier presented researchers that today, communication through internet can be highly personalized even by the choice of IT-based medium that you use to communicate.

Other forms of IT-based communication includes instant messaging and video which has been shown by Hui, S.C et al. (2008) and Whitcomb. A (2016) enables people from geographically far distances apart to communicate both hearing and seeing each other in real time eliminating need and cost for travel, and lost time.

In this research the main focus is on IT-based communication and its effects on the relationships of its users. As shown above it is apparent that IT-based mediums of communication have introduced new ways of how we communicate. Also as shown by Florida (2005) enabling both time and location to be of less of a hinderance than ever before.

2.2.3 Interpersonal relationships

Going back to the findings from Gimenez (2000) which we touched upon earlier. The results presented from this research also strengthens the idea mentioned by Salo (2007) that suggest that the choice of communication medium could require a basic level of the relationship before moving from traditional to IT-based mediums. As an observation made by Gimenez (2000) was that initial contact with the company examined in the study by its customers was by a formal letter. But that once the relationship has been established the more personal and informal medium of emails was preferred (Gimenez, 2000, p. 248).

As mentioned previously in section 2.1.1 about business relationships Cann (1998) argues that a business relationship is desirable when the benefits exceed the risks of the business relationship when both parties gains from the situation. Whether that is
knowledge, services or other advantages they might found useful. If the criteria’s are met then a business relationship is created.

Like Humphries, A et al. (2015) we consider the business relationship to be essential in order to form a successful business whether it is relationship between a business actor and its supplier or a relationship with a costumer or between friends and loved ones. The general goal can vary from each relationship. However, we consider the relationship itself to be essential in order to form a successful partnership. As told previously by Newman, A et al. (2005) the interpersonal relationship is primary conduit through which firms communicate, negotiate and influence one another. Which connect to what Humphries, A et al (2015) considers being essential in order to form a successful relationship.

Kleinaltenkamp, M et al. (2014) describes that the reasons can be specifically created by the partners in the beginning or they could evolve later in the transactions or in the latter course of the business relationship. Therefore as the relationship grows and becomes stronger it will evolve and new advantages that had not been thought if the beginning might come to light in the later part of the relationship. As the relationship grows stronger the satisfaction, trust and a well establish processes become vital for a stable business relationship (Kleinaltenkamp, M et al. 2014, p.127). This idea is something we share and we think it can also connect to interpersonal personal part of our research question. The earlier researches generated many different hypotheses. The earlier data suggest internet affect interpersonal business relationships yet we do not know how. With this study we seek to investigate how it is affected. Hence, the gap from the earlier studies.

2.2.4 Summary of Concepts

From our literature review we know that there has been research made around this area supporting that internet affects relationships and is becoming more integrated in the business environment. For this we need to sprout from what we already know and create a framework that depicts what we wish to achieve with this research. We know that business relationships are built through communication between parties and that when parties want to form business relationship they communicate.

Figure 2 Communication - Business Relationship

From our presented concepts above we have also identified two kinds of communication mediums which can be utilized to create and build relationships, as illustrated below:
Out of these we consider telephone, face-to-face meetings and letters as “traditional means” within this research.

As mentioned above we consider telephone, face-to-face meetings and letters as “traditional mediums” within this research. Whereas the IT-based communication mediums are made up by mail, chat, and live video meetings through internet. The authors want to evaluate specifically how business relationships are affected from communication through internet as experienced by those who work with it. From Anderson and Weitz (1989) we also know that a business relationship is not built upon one factor but that many factors affect a relationship. What we do not know is which factors are, and how these are affected by the use of internet when one uses it in creation and building of business relationships.

### 2.2.5 Approach for Answering our Research Question

As we already know “that” internet affects from the findings by Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) we could also see that their quantitative approach did not respond the question “how”. In this research we will hence, use a qualitative approach as this as argued by Bell & Bryman (2007) and Viisak (2010) allows for more depth and qualitative the data. Going back also to the findings of Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007), this is especially suited to answer questions such as “how”.

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**Figure 3 Communication Mediums**

Out of these we consider telephone, face-to-face meetings and letters as “traditional means” within this research.
As Bell & Bryman (2007) qualitative data allows for more of depth in the respondent's answers. As our research focuses on evaluating how internet affects creation and building of interpersonal business relationships the focus we are going to take is a qualitative since, as Bell & Bryman (2007) puts it, gives us a more depth in the respondent's answers.

As mentioned we are going to interview our respondents and we want to a rich information basis for our analysis later. This can also, as argued by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) yield data not attainable by quantitative mediums. A semi-structured interview provides the opportunity for the respondent to explain his or her viewpoint more than a questionnaire. We acknowledge that since people are different in their approach to the things around them it is also important to allow them to answer to questions in their own way. For this we have also chosen to adopt a semi-structured interview which enables us to yield more qualitative-oriented data (Saunders, M et. al. 2009).

In this research have chosen to adopt a comparative case study design. The reason behind this is that it allows us to focus on specific parts in the relationship creating and building chain. As Viisak, (2010) states it is beneficial to use the research design when writing in a field that has limited knowledge about the subject. In this research this method is suitable as we will be relying on data solely collected from interviews. Hence, the data will therefore be limited to what the interviewees chose to answer.

According to Ragin, C (1984) there is two ways to make a comparative case study, qualitative or quantitative. Since our research question is focused on explaining “how” a medium affects a situation the qualitative comparative case study suits the research as a qualitative case study focus on the whole case rather partial pieces with quantitative. By doing this we will be trying to get a deeper understanding, “how” internet affects rather than only confirming “that” it does affect.

When analyzing the data collected in our research we are going to apply the thematic analysis method as presented by Braun & Clarke (2006). This method is beneficial for our research as it is designed to study patterns from qualitative data based on people's experiences.
Chapter 3: Methodology

With this study we are trying to explain a situation from a users’ point of view, in our study these users will be workers who use internet for communication with clients. This is because the worker is usually the one who handles and take care of the relationships between different companies. As we previously mentioned in our research question we want to find out how internet affects interpersonal relationships between business and we think that the worker who utilize this medium on daily basis is the best suited individual to answer this question.

As we explained earlier we wish to conduct a research with which we hope to generate a theory, the opposite way of conducting a research involves that one start with an existing theory and conduct testing to validate its statement. If the research has a stance similar to the former one it is known as a inductive study, whereas the latter is known as an inductive one. As we want to generate a new theory our study is inductive. Another thing concerning the nature of this research is its genre. Based on its initial properties we also want to say that this is an exploratory study because we are doing a research in a field where there is little existing knowledge.

3.1 Methodological Background

3.1.1 Personal Reflections

Like any other scientific study or research it is important to stay objective during observation and when collecting data. The authors of the study will try to stay as objective as possible. However, Bell and Bryman (2007, p. 30-32) states that when conducting any research the writers knowledge and experience will, in some way, affect their research. This is something the authors will have in mind.

The authors of the study have slightly different educational background, both however in business administration, this will maybe be reflected in the thesis in such a way that the authors will look at different aspect and have different perceptions of the data that will be collected. Hence, there is also a possibility that the authors will overlook some aspects not related to their field. The authors are aware of the problem and will constantly try to make sure that this does not happen.

3.1.2 Choice of Subject

When we started out we wanted to contribute knowledge to something that could be tied to both our fields of interest. We also wanted our subject to be relevant in time meaning that our insights were something that we could make use of once we entered the working field ourselves. Internet, which is our subject, fit the description well. We are both born and raised in the computer era and have a good basic understanding of its uses and possibilities. Internet is a big part in both of our everyday life for communication as well as using it to buy and sell goods and services. Being raised with the internet we also have a good basic overview of how the internet has developed over the years. By also being adapted to using the internet we both have our own positive and negative experiences with it as well as our own set of identified drawbacks.
We see internet as a big contributor to today’s society and we feel excited to be working with it in a situation where you can really elaborate on how the internet affect its surrounding, namely where technology meets people.

Since both of us are business administration students we wanted to see how internet affected businesses today, more precisely business-to-business. From our own experience with the internet, both shopping and contacting different companies, the question raised was, how interpersonal relationships is affected since much communication is done online and not in person like before internet was developed. With this in our minds we developed our subject which included all these parts we wanted to investigate.

3.2 Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

3.2.1 Epistemological Considerations

Trying to decide on an epistemological viewpoint is a complicated task. Bell and Bryman (2007) discusses two opposite sides of epistemology for social studies that we feel are worth mentioning.

The first one is positivism which is a position where the author sets out to generate and test hypotheses. Positivism relies on strict rules for science generation where only things detected by the senses are seen as valid for knowledge basis. Another important note is that generation of science must be “value free” meaning that the study should be objective (Bell and Bryman, 2007, p.16).

The other side is Interpretivism. The interpretivism-position has risen among many writers arguing that positivism is not applicable to social studies because positivism applies natural science reasoning on social studies (Bell and Bryman, 2007, p.17). One of the arguments is that humans and human nature usually working and reasoning against the natural order. Bell and Bryman’s definition is derived from works by Von Wright (1971) and argues that interpretivism is an epistemological view that aims to understand human behavior while positivism aims at explaining it. The argument against the positivism approach in social sciences is that human behavior is not explainable through the natural science methods (Bell & Bryman 2007, p. 17). Ledoux (2002) defines natural sciences as: “disciplines that deal only with natural events (i.e., independent and dependent variables in nature) using scientific methods” (p.34).

One of the criteria posed by positivism is that knowledge can only be void if it is confirmed through our senses (Bell & Bryman, 2007, p. 16). Since we in our research are going to evaluate human feelings, we reckon that this criterion is fulfilled. In a way feelings can be displayed through facial expressions, body language etc. and can be detected by the human senses but we reckon that this in not in the way that the authors means. Another criterion is that positivism approach should focus on hypothesis generation and testing.

In our research the aim is focused on relationship creation and building through different mediums. Relationships, as mentioned above can in some forms be detected by the human senses but are generally invisible. Also going from the differences presented by Von Wright (1971) between positivism and interpretivism, we do seek to understand “how” internet as medium affects relationships creation and building and not explain
“why” it affects. Because of this the authors are going to use the view of the interpretivism as our direction in this study.

Going back to Von Wright’s separation of the interpretivism and positivism, concerning their difference in objective (understanding, explaining) we find the interpretivism-approach more suitable for our research. Interpretivism uses subjective meanings in the social world that already exists and recognizes, uses and understands them in order to build a theory upon them (Goldkuhl, Göran. 2012, p.138). As we are not testing an existing theory this further supports the use of an interpterivistic view.

3.2.2 Ontological Considerations

Ontology deals with the question of whether social entities are external from social actors and their actions or whether they are constructions that are built through the actions and perceptions of social actors (Bell & Bryman, 2007, p. 22). To the explanation we also like to state that “social entities” refers to “the separate existence of an organization that is perceived to exist, by its members and the public at large, as a given, i.e. something that exists before and outside of them” (VentureLine, 2012). Thus, when you are approaching ontology there are different points of views. Bryman and Bell (2007) focus on two different approaches that we feel are worth mentioning.

The first one is objectivism, which takes the view that social entities are external from social actors. In this philosophy the entity holds norms and values that the individuals within the entity conforms after. An example can be policies or behaviors that the company has which apply to their workers within the entity. Thus, the values are not something that the individual effects but external from the social actors.

Constructivism is the other view. It sees the norms of entities as in being “in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction” (Becker, 1982, p.521) and recognize that the social actors, individuals, workers, are the ones causing it to change. Meaning that rather than having the entity already having a set of norms and changing the individuals, the individuals themselves are a part in changing the company’s norms. Thus, the social actors become a part of the social entity.

In our research we sympathize with the constructivism view. Our experience is that workers in Sweden today are usually allowed to affect their surroundings. The workers are allowed to have their own norms and values in their working space and that these affect the working place and its norms. Rather than the company imposing their norms on its workers we reckon that the workers are given much freedom when it comes to how workers conduct their work. We also think that this is especially true for people who work towards customers, which are our target group, as they are responsible for interpreting the customers, their needs and situations and then decide on the most suitable action to take, or medium to use in order to build a beneficial relationship with the same.

In our study we are going to conduct individual interviews. The reason is that we wish to receive individual answers on our topic. We are certain that companies today are able to apply multiple mediums of communication but we think that different individuals have different attitudes towards using them. Finding out if there are different attitudes is one of the reasons for conducting this study. By using personal interviews we hope that we will be able to differentiate between these different feelings people have towards using internet for communication.
At the same time we also think that the preferences that people has, as mentioned, will in a long term affect the entity, and that these preferences could have been one of the external reasons as to why even “older” companies choose to apply internet in their practices. From the discussion we therefore take a constructivism point of view when conducting this research.

When we have considered our epistemological and ontological directions Bell and Bryman (2007) also offer us additional information that will guide our study. The authors argue that the choice of these influences also determines what type of study is most suitable in terms of a quantitative or qualitative approach. We present an illustration of their table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Deductive: Testing of theory</td>
<td>Inductive: Generation of theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological orientation</td>
<td>Natural science model, in particular positivism</td>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ontological orientation</td>
<td>Objectivism</td>
<td>Constructionism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Bell & Bryman, 2007, p. 28*

**Table 1: Differences in Research Strategies**

One of the research aims mentioned by the authors for a qualitative approach is where “emphasis is placed on the generation of theories” (Bell & Bryman, 2007 p. 28). This reason fits well with our aim as we want to evaluate a situation from a new perspective and generate a theory that can later be tested by a successive research. Using their table it also makes sense since both interpretivism and constructionism are the most suitable considerations from our point of view. Through a quantitative study such as the one performed by Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000), one is able to grasp generalized results over a large amount of participants. The problem, as we see it, with these generalized results is that numerical testing is not able to evaluate the single user’s perceptions. Also, quantitative questionnaires are usually structured, forcing the interviewee to choose from a pre-decided set of answers. Looking back at the articles in the literature review we can see that among the ones handling trust and relationships, Anderson and Weitz’s (1989) is quantitative. Gallivan’s (2003) article which uses other articles can also be considered as quantitative since the data salvaged from the 16 articles are of this nature. Further, the internet articles which bring theories out in practice for testing are also quantitative. What we aim to do is to conduct a study which involves these three parts viewed from a qualitative angle. With a qualitative approach we can generate new knowledge within this field.

As we can see, related subjects have been investigated but mainly through quantitative approaches. This means that there is a gap in the information gained through qualitative
researches. With the study we want to fill this gap by conducting interviews which will allow the users to answer our questions in their own way. Having already being set on collecting data through individual interviews this is also an additional support for the qualitative approach.

3.2.3 Paradigm Choice

Having arrived at our epistemological and ontological considerations we want to tie them together in a joint direction. A good way for this is by the use of paradigms. Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest a model based on four parts, as viewed below:

![Table 2: Four Paradigms of Social Theory](image)

In the model each paradigm represents a mix of epistemological and ontological considerations. Bell and Bryman (2007) offers us help in explaining these. Each paradigm can be seen as either objective or subjective, and also categorized as regulatory or radical. Whether the considerations are objective or subjective is determined by whether the study is done by through an external view of the studied subject (objective) or if the study requires the input and experience of the people involved with it (subjective) (Bell & Bryman, 2007, p.25-26).

It also determines whether the study is considered to be regulatory or radical. Regulatory is a study which aims to describe and interpret a situation without judging it. A radical study in comparison, wishes to examine and affect a situation, making statements about it and offer suggestions of improve it (Bell & Bryman, 2007, p.26).
These considerations are then shown in four different examples as for a study of organizations:

- Functionalist, which focuses on problem-solving;
- Interpretive, which argues that knowledge needs to be based on the experience of those who work with it;
- Radical humanist, which argues that individuals need to be separated from the organization and driven by the need for change, and;
- Radical structuralist, where an organizational is made up through power relationships and leads to conflict.

(Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.26)

With these definitions we are able to easier set our aim in the epist-ontological jungle. Seeing how we want to base our study upon the thoughts of those working within corporations, our study becomes subjective. Also since we only want to observe and explain a situation we are not going to judge or try to affect it, our study becomes regulatory. Taking these considerations into account and turning to Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) model our preferred paradigm would be interpretive. This aim suits our study well and also gets support from another theory.

In a multiple case study Hassard (1991) is trying to test the applicability of the four paradigms. The setting he used was issues of work within organizations. The conclusion he reaches is that the different paradigms are suitable to studies within different fields of a company. These are as follows:

- Job motivation (Functionalist paradigm)
- Work routines (Interpretive paradigm)
- Management training (Radical humanist paradigm)
- Employment relations (Radical structuralist)

(Hassard 1991)

Creating and building business relationships is something that can, as discussed earlier in the literature review, be conducted through many mediums. Internet is one of these and as we want to see how it affects business relationships we are specifically looking deeper into how the business relationships are affected by the utilization of this new medium. We recognize internet as a new medium which has brought new working routines for how to contact and communicate with individuals. When working with our research question we are evaluating how employees use internet as a medium and these new routines that it has brought, affect business relationships. Seeing it from this view and taking into consideration Hassard’s (1991) categorization it is also evident that our study suits the interpretive paradigm as we are trying to evaluate how internet affect working processes for the individuals.
3.3 Research Design

The research design for the thesis requires a little bit of extra thought because of the aim of our research. What we aim to evaluate is how internet affects creation and building of interpersonal business relationships, something that is hard to generalize due to individuality.

Unlike in many of the studies mentioned in the literature review we are going to conduct a qualitative study. People’s opinions are hard to understand and measure, as such we feel that it would be difficult and time consuming to collect accurate quantitative data. Qualitative data allows for more of depth which we think is important when evaluate different opinions. Another reason is that qualitative research is more focused on theory generation while quantitative is used mainly for theory testing (Bell & Bryman, 2007, p. 28). In our research we are trying to understand “what is happening” and not “why it is happening”, we are trying to see an effect rather than testing whether or not an assumption about it is true.

We have chosen to adopt a comparative case study design for this research. The reason for this is that it allows us to focus on a specific part in the relationship creation and building chain. For us this “part” are individuals in small and medium enterprises (SME’s), assigned with the task of establishing and building relationships with other corporations (B2B-relationships). Viisak also notes that this research design is beneficial when one is researching in a field where there is limited knowledge since the data collected does not need to be based on empirical evidence but can be taken directly from its context, for example as in our case where we take our data directly from workers (Viisak, 2010, p. 371). Further Chetty (1996) argues in his article that a case study can indeed be used for scientific generalization through theory generalization in comparison to the more commonly used statistical generalization which relies on numbers (Chetty, 1996. p.74). Another thing connected to this statement and noted by Chetty (1996) is that case study design can be used to reveal insights not visible through larger surveys (p.81), arguing that smaller sample sizes can prove significant despite being small. This also strengthens our opinion that case study design is the most suitable for us since a) we focus on a specific, small number of internet users within firms and; b) we have a limited time to establish contact with and conduct the workers for our interviews.

This fact also makes it hard to adopt other designs. Experimental design(s) for example, relies on a control group in order to present proof of change over time. As we are evaluating how a medium is affecting communication based on individuals it is almost impossible to determine what could be regarded as “general effects” which would be suitable to act as control group. Cross-sectional design could have been interesting since data collection is made at a single point in time. Computer use within SME’s is undergoing a change at the moment and we are trying to establish what that change affect at the moment, however, cross-sectional design is more suitable to collect and compare quantitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 55). This is inconvenient since we are only interesting in making a qualitative study. Thus the design gets out-ruled in favor of case-design.

Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) who supports this approach points out that doing a qualitative case study research can indeed be feasible for a number of reasons. By doing interviews, as we are, they recognizes that it will give access to rich and informative
data (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 28). However, she also points out that in order for us to reach a valid conclusion in the end it is important that we link everything that we state in text to our research question and goal so that its validity becomes strong from the foundation and through the whole study, but if done properly the design is especially suited for answering questions such as “how” or “why” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 26), hence, suitable for our study.

In our study we are going to conduct a case study where we compare how internet communication affects relationship creation and building between different individuals this is because the comparison provides us with a foundation statement about empirical regularities between our employees. Also, for interpreting cases relative to substantive and theoretical criteria (Ragin, C, 1984, p. 1). Thus, making our case study a comparative one.

There are two different approaches for a comparative case study. Those are qualitative and quantitative. A qualitative comparative case study, studies the cases a whole as in comparison to quantitative who is tend to study the cases in partial (Ragin, C, 1984, p. 3).

One of uses for a comparative case study are interested in questions that have limited knowledge and do not have substantial or historical data. Their questions are much more circumscribe and concentrated to a specific subject. As their study is limited to a specific subject only a small set of cases may provide the basis for empirical generalization (Ragin, C, 1984, p. 11).

3.3.1 Data Collection Method

As we are focusing on how internet as a medium affects interpersonal business relationship creation and building by the answers of those who use it we want to gather data in the most accurate way, thus choosing proper data gathering methods is vital to get results from a relevant point of view. In doing so, we are going to conduct our research through interviews as we reckon that these allow us to get the most accurate data. However, there are also different ways of conducting interviews, as such we need to establish which way is most suitable for our research. Britten (1995) mentions three different kinds of interview ways; structured, semi-structured and depth interviews. Although this article is made in a medical setting the author mentions that it discusses qualitative research as a whole, hence we feel that its content can be used to guide us in this research. We find her view relevant for our study and hence, want to explain the different interview-ways she mentions.

Structured interviews are guided interviews from the start to finish. The interviewer knows what question he/she wants to ask and has a predetermined way of asking the questions, which means that all interviews are made in the same manner. Often it also involves giving the respondents a set of predetermined answers to choose from.

Semi-structured interviews are more open with the interviewer asking the respondents questions that may have been outlined beforehand but the way they are asked are more improvised giving the interview a more of a regular conversation-like manner. The respondent is also often given the opportunity to answer the questions in his/her own way making the answers more individual and usually the responses deeper.

Depth interviews are even more open than the semi-structured ones, with the interviewer only asking the respondents about topics or areas which he/she wishes to
cover. At the same time the consecutive questions are often based on the answers received from the previous, giving depth interviews spontaneous questions and unpredictable answers (Britten, 1995, p. 251).

Among these we think that for our purpose, semi-structured interviews is the best choice. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity for the interviewee to explain or build their answers. This is important if you have a interpretivist view in your research. This is when the authors want to understand why the participants feel in a certain way. This can also lead to opportunities for discussions during the interview which could increase the understanding of the participants answer significantly (Saunders, M et al. 2009, p. 324).

Applying semi-structure allows the interviewed participants to present their answers in their own words; something that we find relevant for the study. It also lowers the risk of the answers being from the respondents being “the best of choice”, in other words, that the risk of us affecting the answers. At the same time, by not using the depth interview model we prevent the interviews from striving too far from our subject. Qualitative interviews as these however, are usually a time consuming method but more detailed than quantitative interviews and questionnaires (Viisak, T. 2010 p. 374-375).

According to Rabionet (2011) there are six steps that the interviewer needs to consider when conducting a semi-structured interview. The first step contains the interviewer to select what kind of interview he or she wants to conduct. The interviewer needs to consider the outcome of the interview. What kind of information they need to gather and what are the pros and cons for this kind of interview, seen from the interviewer’s perspective (Rabionet, 2011).

For our study we first discussed what information we wanted to get out of the interview. Since our research question is focusing on how employees use internet as a medium and how internet affect business relationships creation and building the best way for us was to conduct either a telephone or face-to-face interview with the respondent. This was because we reckon these methods allows the respondents to elaborate on their answers during the interview while letting us listen to their elaboration, thus yielding rich answers that contains much usable data. When creating the interview questions we were however faced with an obstacle, being that we did not know much about what kind of specific questions we should ask in order to get the necessary information for our research since our study is mainly focusing on people's’ norms, thoughts and how they interpret that internet affects business relationships.

The second step the interviewer requires to establishing ethical guidelines. When conducting an interview there need to be an ethical guideline for what kind of questions can be asked and how do you ask these questions. Do the questions invade on specific person’s privacy that is uncalled for? (Rabionet, 2011).

Since our data is built up by answers of employees and thoughts towards internet, this step was very important for us. When creating our question we were always focusing whether these questions were correctly formulated and needed in our research in order for us to get the information we needed. We wanted to avoid questions that invaded on the respondents’ privacy. What we did in order to solve this complexity was to create questions were the respondent could themselves control what the respondents wanted to say but still get enough information for our study to answer our research question.
Hence, the respondent would decide him/herself how much personal information would be included in their answers.

The third step is crafting the interview protocol. The interviewer need to consider what kind of questions needs to be asked in order to get useful information that can later be used. Also, how many questions need to be asked in order to fill the information gap. Questions like these make the difference from a good interview to a great interview where all the information that needs to be gathered has been gathered successfully. This is the most important step in order to establish quality in your research (Rabionet, 2011). Another important thing when conducting an interview is that the respondent needs to be told how the information will be used and if possible the respondent needs to know (by either getting the full paper or research when finished) that the information the respondent has given has not be misused or tweaked.

We chose to have two sets of questions, the first concerning the companies and the second the individuals. We will come back to the first set but for now focus our attention on the second set which concerns the main part of our research. The questions in our second set were divided into three different segments, or “categories”. The first segment was about the respondent’s workplace. Information about the company was the respondent worked. The second segment asks about different contact mediums and also how the user applies these. In the third segment we posed more personal questions in order to get the thought and feelings towards how the respondents thought the internet affected their relationships. We expect that these three segments within the interview will allow us to gain the information we want to gather.

The respondents felt that they needed some kind of information or guarantee that the information we got was used in a way they approved of. What we did in order to see to this need was to promise all the respondents a copy of our finished thesis before we handed it in for the main opposition so the respondents could see how the information has been used before we handed in our work to grading. On these terms the respondents were glad to let us interview them.

The fourth step is conducting and recording the interview. When conducting the interview it is important to take some form of notes in order to recall the right information in the research, there are several ways to do this. For example taking written notes, video and audio recording (Rabionet, 2011).

In our research we were put in a situation where we did not know how we were going to record our interviews. Since our interviews were conducted in two different ways, some face-to-face some by telephone interview. This would mean that we needed to find two different tools to record our interview so we can recall a respondent correctly.

What we did was when conducting the telephone interview we recorded the conversation on the phone. When we later had interviews where we conducted them face-to-face we used a recording device in order for us to recall the information the respondents said correctly. When recording someone over the phone or face-to-face interview it is essential to inform the respondents that they are being recorded in order for us to get their approval.

The fifth step analyzing and summarizing the interview. The focus lies how the interviewer are going to analyze the gathered data. It is very common to transcribe the
interview from a recording to paper in order to get a better overview of the data before
the analysis process (Rabionet, 2011).

Since the main part of our study is concerned with the contents of the interviews we will
conduct it is crucial that we do the analysis thoroughly. As such it is also important that
we do not miss anything that has been said, as such we have decided that we are going
to transcribe the interviews before we analyze them. We also anticipate that this will
save us time when the analysis is conducted as we can get a good overview of the
different parts of the interviews and fast find the content we are looking for without
having to go back and forth over a recording.

The sixth and last step is reporting the findings. The sixth step focuses how you report
your findings and use them in your research. There are a few issues that the researcher
can come in contact with (Rabionet, 2011).

We are going to answer our research question by using the information that we gathered
through the interviews. When the interviews have been concluded the responses are to
be compared as we will be trying to detect similarities and patterns. From these we hope
to establish if internet as a communication medium has any effect on interpersonal
relationships in business-to-business.

Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) notices that using multiple cases yields a more solid
foundation and greater validity and generalizability. This is because you examine the
object from more than just one point of view. For us the “object” is internet and since
we want to know how different people use it, we reckon that our results will be more
relevant if we use people with different backgrounds and points of view. Hence, the
interviews we will conduct will be taking place at several different companies,
operating within different areas. This will enable us to see if there is any difference
between people working in companies were computer communication is more
integrated in the company’s foundation. The persons questioned will also be of different
ages which are interesting since it allows us to see whether there is a difference in
perception between people born and raised with computers in comparison to those that
have been taught these practices later in life. In the same way that people have different
perceptions which means that different businesses have different uses for internet and
how it affects their business. Hence, we argue that using multiple companies will also
strengthen the validity of our research.

To further strengthen the validity we will also examine and use previous literature
relating to our subject. Most of this however will be aimed at supporting our methods
and guide us in our analysis of our interviews since there is limited documentation on
our specific topic. The literature we aim to use will be journals, official publications
and also the recordings that we will collect during our interviews.

3.3.2 Data Analysis Method

In our research the data we collect will be from our interviews and once our data-
samples are collected we need to decide on how to analyze in order for it to yield any
results. For this work we are going to apply a thematic analysis method. The method
aims to describe patterns within qualitative data that concerns people and their
experiences of the world around them to explain the phenomenon studied (Braun &
Clarke, 2006 p.80). A good advantage we find with the method is that it gives the users
free hands when they are deciding on what they want to put in it. It allows the author to
pick out the information relevant for his own study and easy put it in the method. We think that the properties of this method fit well what we want to examine, at the same time it is flexible enough to suit our research. Hence we find this method suitable to adopt. The thematic analysis method involves 6 different steps for conducting the analysis part within the study; these are shown below (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p.87):

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data: Transcribing data, reading and rereading the data while writing down initial ideas.

2. Generating initial codes: Here you go through the initial ideas and pick out the specific data that is interesting for the analysis. This section will be made up by our empirical sector.

3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. For us this means that we are discussing and sorting the different data we found interesting into different aspects of how it affects our analysis.

4. Reviewing themes: Here we are re-checking, the themes data and evaluate whether there is enough evidence in it to support our themes.

5. Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, picked out in step four.

6. Producing the report: Here we finalize the analysis based on the themes, describe what we have done in the analysis and argues for its validity. (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p.87)

After we have gone through the steps required for the thematic analysis we will be presenting our results in a table. The table we will be using is presented below.
By separating each respondents answers into different columns it will be easier to distinguish each respondent’s answer from another. Our interview questions are divided into three different sections, as mentioned before. Therefore we will be using three different themes in our table and those represent the three different sections within our questions.

The respondents with a 1 next their question states that the interviewee agreed upon said question. A 0 next to the question mean that the interviewee did not agree with the said question. When a participant did not have an answer or could not decide an answer we will place an X next to the question to indicate this.

The table we are using was created by us to fit with our research, however the inspiration and the initial idea was drawn from Ragin (1987). In his book he present the “truth table” created from Boolean algebra reasoning. The truth table is used to compare and qualitative data and distinguish patterns by sorting variables from the data as “true” or “false”. The method also involves checking each variable with each other, this means that if there are four independent variables the table will include 16 rows as each variable will be tested against each other. For our thesis we are not going to compare the different variables/rows with each other but rather compare the answers we get from our different interviewees on the single variable with each other. The variables that we are using are not dependent on each other which make testing against each other irrelevant. However, we want to look at all the answers together and compare them between the different individuals. From this we are going to distinguish patterns of similarity and differences.

By using this method we hope that we will be able to generate an accurate response to our research question and shed light onto this research area.

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<td>0 = disagree</td>
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<td>X = cannot decide/did not make a statement</td>
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Table 3: Thematic Analysis Table
3.3.3 Our Questions

According to Saunders, M et al. (2009) there are two sets of technique when creating a questionnaire. Those are Self-administered and Interviewer-administered questionnaires. Self-administered are for the most part completed by the respondent him or herself while responses to the Interviewer-administered are recorded by the interviewer. This could be either through a telephone or face-to-face meeting (p. 362-363). Since we are going to use telephone and face-to-face interviews the Interviewer-administered approach is best suited for our study.

When we are conducting our interviews we will ask two different sets of questions; one set is aimed at the company which the person works for, the others are individual questions. The company questions are concerned with basic, official facts about the company that are intended to give us and the readers of our work a background of the companies. Since the answers to these questions are not individual we are only going to ask this question to one person within every company that we use. The data collected from these questions are the base for our presentation of the companies in the sample selection-section.

The personal questions are asked as the main part of our thesis. Here we want the individual answers in order to get individual point of views, these will be the main part of our thesis and as we strive to get individual perspectives each question is asked with this aim in mind. The coming section outlines our questions and their importance for our research. The personal questions are divided under three different categories, the first category is intended to give us a short work description of the individuals. The following concerns how our participants contact and communicate with new customers, and the last category deals with our interviewees’ perception of internet.

When we developed our questions we followed the advices recommended by Britten (1995). This method gradually increases the difficulty and intimacy of the questions. This is made so that the interviewees do not become uncomfortable and refuses to answer our questions. Hence, using this method we hope that we will be able to get the most information out of our data.

The questions in the first category are asked to give us a picture of the individual we are interviewing and also help us to ascertain that we are interviewing an individual who is relevant for the study. The questions also were impersonal and simple on the mind which we thought would help to ease possible nervousness for the interviewees. With the following questions we want to know how much internet plays a role in the individual’s communication, here we might see how the individual uses internet in combination with other means and get a picture over how big of a part internet plays in this individual’s communication processes. In the last questions we focus more directly on the interviewees thoughts concerning internet as a mean and how the respondents perceive that it affects business relationship; here we want to gain the most vital data for our study. Asking the questions in this step-like manner increasing the level of personal thoughts gradually is made intentionally as we reckon that it helps the individual to “build on” gradually his previous answers which we feel would be most comfortable to the respondent and efficient for us.
Company-Questions

The questions in this section are asked to give us a brief history of the company, its age, number of employees and target market. We also want to know for how long internet has been integrated in the company’s activities.

We argue that knowing a company’s age is important in many aspects. One aspect is that an older company might already have a stable network of clients which means that new technology such as internet to attract new clients might not be incentive enough to break away from traditional methods. In the opposite direction a younger company might rely heavily on the internet as a mean to improve their effectiveness or image.

Knowing the numbers of employees will give us a physical estimation of the company size. This is important as we perceive that the size of the company also affects how big possibility the company has to invest in communication improvements. Bigger companies with many workers might also have a bigger need for internal communication which can work as a stimulus for communication development.

With this thesis we want to evaluate how internet is affecting interpersonal business-to-business relationships creation and building. Thus, we must be sure that the company is engaging in business-to-businesses activities on regular basis. Hence, we will also ask if the company is solely dealing with directly with businesses or if they have private customers as well to ensure that even if they are concerned dealing with both parties, the majority should be focused on business-to-business.

We also want to know how long internet has been used for operations. The authors’ perspective is that knowing how long companies have been using internet in comparison to their time of existence gives a hint of how integrated the medium is in its practices. The more a company is used to this practice the more adopt it has become to make use of its possibilities.

Personal Questions

What kind of work did our participants have?

In this study we are interested in anyone that, in his work has any form of communication with customers through internet. We perceive that companies might address roles differently within their companies; hence we initially want to ask the interviewee about his/hers role. At the same time, we do not know if different working positions will make any difference in the use of internet, as such it is important that we know each participant’s role so that we can evaluate such possible differences as well.

As a continuation of the initial question we are then going to ask what this individual is doing in his/hers role, what his working tasks are. This will give us more depth about what the person does. We think that this can also be different in businesses of different sizes where, in small businesses one person can be in charge of multiple roles and tasks, also the same tasks might be handled differently in different companies. Therefore it is important to know what tasks the person is conducting.

If the company is dealing with private as well as business clients we also want to know which customers the individual interviewed is dealing with. For the same reason as asking whether or not the company deals with business and private customers this
question is important. This will ensure us that we are interviewing the right person. As it is important that the person we are interviewing is working at least partly, with business-customers.

How our participants did contact and communicate with new customers?

Every individual is different and thus deals with situations differently. Knowing this we want to ask how the interviewees make contact with new clients. This will tell us which different methods the individual has to his/her disposal. Focus is also laid on “new” clients which means that the individual is to mention methods he uses for initial contact. This is important as a first impression can be decisive for a beneficial relationship. Here we also benefit from keeping the interviews semi-structured as we do not give any incentive for the individual to talk about one method over another.

While we strive to not affect the interviewees answers there might be other things that does. One of these is if the employees are entitled to follow certain orders in which to use different methods. If this is the case we think that it is likely that it affects the individual perception of the mediums. Hence we also ask if the respondents are free to choose their order mediums used to establish contacts.

We want to dive deeper into the individual preferences and hence we also intend to ask about which mediums the interview prefer to use, and why. We want to see the personal preference. This question is important because it can reveal differences in the preferences of different individuals. This information can help us see patterns of differences which will help us when we are to draw our conclusions.

One motivator to use a certain method is effectiveness. If an individual reckon that a certain method can ease a task it can motivate the use of it. We reckon that this can occur even if the individual is not fond of the method itself. Hence we also want to know which medium the interviewee finds more effective it also tells us whether the individual chose himself to use effective over preferred method.

Our Interviewees Perception of Internet

Here we ask directly about internet, and to start this section we want to ask a question that is aimed at the individual’s own preference and is intended to give us deeper understanding in the individual’s preferences concerning internet in communication specifically. Hence we are going to ask about their thoughts of internet as a medium to communicate with clients.

We are then going to continue on ask about how internet has affected the creation and building of relationships. This question requires an individual answer but the question itself is concerned with an effective issue. It requires the interviewee to give an answer on a general question from his own point of view. As such, we are able to see if the view of whether internet helps or not differs from person to person.

Further we want to dig a little deeper into what we aim to evaluate. We want to ask if the interviewee perceive any difference in the interpersonal relationship if the relationship is formed and/or maintained through internet as compared to traditional mediums. The question is open and leaves room for the interviewee to mention other things as affecting factors as well. This allow us to understand which are the most important things affected for this individual.
With all the earlier answers in mind we then move on to ask directly how the respondents experience that trust is affected. Whether or not the last question was answered with the word “trust” we here want to mix in this though because, as we have seen earlier in the literature review, trust is considered to be an important part of the relationship.

For the last question we are looking for a more elaborated answer than simply yes or no, hence, if the answer is of such a short nature we will also ask our interviewees to elaborate more of this answer.

Since this research is exploring an area which is relatively unexplored it is hard to find support on which questions we should be asking. The questions presented have been created by us to get the most relevant information for our study. However, Britten (1995) has offered us a bit of guidance in shaping these.

According to Britten a qualitative interview should mention at least one of six areas presented below in order to be considered a good qualitative interview, these six areas are:

- Behaviour or experience
- Opinion or belief
- Feelings
- Knowledge
- Sensory
- Background or demographic

(Britten, 1995, p. 251)

We reckon that our questions cover three of these areas, namely area 1-3. This strengthens our view that our questions are fitting for this kind of study.

Going from our research question we want to see how internet affects interpersonal relationships creation and building. As such it is also important to know about our interviewees habits when it comes to using the internet for the same. For this reason we will be asking about our interviewees habits about both the medium of choice, and about their experiences of using IT-based, as compared to traditional mediums. This means that we will be asking questions about our interviewees opinions. As such we are also interested in, and will be asking questions about our interviewees own views on the medium, hence including their opinions and beliefs about it.

As Britten (1995) mentions it is important to gradually deepen the questions in order for the interviewee to not feel uncomfortable. Therefore we will gradually increase the intimacy of our questions. As our focus lies on the individual’s point of view is this research we strive to influence the respondents as little as possible. By doing this we keep the respondent answering with an open mind with every question. Another reason for this is also that we get the respondents direct feelings about the subjects. By doing this we are covering one of Britten (1995) areas, namely feelings.
All of these considerations are taken as we argue that to understand how the use of IT-based mediums affect relationship creation and building, you have to include the people who work with the medium. The reason for this being that these individuals are also the ones who both affect how the medium is used and received. This, as our interviewees come in contact with both internet from “both” ends by both using it to contact other people and being contacted through it. Going back this also fits well with our ontological view of constructivism which, as mentioned, argues that norms and entities are in a continuous state of change. Where the change is being done by those who uses, or are affected by them. Our interviewees will all be free to choose by themselves how to contact potential clients. Hence, making their actions follow the constructivism consideration.

3.4 Sample Selection

As we are focusing on business-to-business relationship and how those are established we need to glance into the businesses that sell services or products to other companies. In order to know which company to choose we have a few criteria that we look at when we are choosing a company. One criterion is that the company needs to conduct their business in Sweden since our time is limited. We thought it will take longer to get in contact with people outside Sweden.

Another criterion we have when choosing our companies are that the individual that we interview will have to be engaged in the creation and building of the company’s customer relationships. These individuals may have other working tasks as well but cannot be without engagement in the customer relations.

As we proceed in our research it is important to know who these people are. Our conclusion is that it is the people that either sell to other companies or act like a key account managers. We have chosen to adopt Qfinance’s definition of a key account manager which follows: “Marketing management of most important customer relationships the management of the customer relationships that are most important to a company” (Qfinance, 2009). Why we have identified these people are because we consider these people to give us most information about our subject. These people handle the business relationship with other companies every day which makes them in our minds the best people to choose to interview in our study.

Our subject focuses on getting the thoughts from these people that handle business relationship. What do the respondents think about the medium internet and the way they are creating their relationships and potential customers? In order to answer this we need people that handle the company’s business relationship and this is why we have chosen these people in our study.

This allows us to gather the information we need in order to answer our question. Since we are conducting interviews with these people we need to focus on how the relationships are built and what methods are used to create these business relationships.

One of the things that we think might affect the feelings about using internet as a mean for communication is whether or not the individual is “born” within the computer-era or has grown up in the world without them, having to adapt to them later in life. Thus, we will also be interviewing individuals of different ages.
3.5 The Companies

When the criteria’s had been established we began to find our companies. This was not an easy task. This was because most of the companies we tried to contact either did not have the time for our interview question or was not fond of the idea. Which is understandable since the interviews were made in-between working hours. We contacted around 15 different companies before we found three companies who agreed to help us and let us interview their employees.

The first company we established contact with and wanted to be a part of our study was m4. This company is big compared to the other two in our study despite being only six years of age. It was founded in 2010 out of 4 corporations in the area Mälardalen in middle Sweden, thus the name. Its main operations concern construction and facility but they also operate within environment, recycling, distribution and storage. Their clients consist of other corporations as well as county councils and other bigger contractors. m4 is a large stock based corporation that has an annual turnover of around 1.5 billion SEK. The company is owned by shareholders who also serve as its contractors owning their own equipment such as trucks or excavators which aid the company in fulfilling their contracts towards their customers. All in all the company encompasses around 90 officials and 130 hired employees. Although the company is in itself fairly young it should be noted that all of the four companies has been established within similar businesses and much of the original personnel had been kept once the companies merged. This is one of the reasons for why we think that the officials of this company are fitting for our thesis. Emerging through already existing companies also has its benefits, one of these is the knowledge-resources and experience compounded within the company, a resource that m4 itself is promoting on their homepage. Besides this the company also has an established network of business relationships, many of which have been formed in the earlier companies.

The majority of the contacts that we have established within m4 have been working within the company from before the merge and also begun their service before internet was such a closely integrated part of their work as it is today. Thus many of them have experienced the change that their working environment has undergone as internet has become more and more integrated, this is something that we think may affect their perception of the mean.

The fact that the company, although though m4 officially is quite young, the four original companies also heir from when internet was less used is one of the knowledge and experience factor beneficial for us. We expect that by interviewing people that has been in the business from before internet played such a major role in communications allows them to compare now and then. This allows us to get a point of view of this medium unseen by our own eyes and also, we anticipate that it will help us to differentiate patterns between young and older generations. m4 is situated in Sweden, as such we feel that they fulfill our criteria regarding situation.

The second company that takes part in our study is the IT-company Pineberry. The company is, like m4, fairly young having stepped into the market in 2007 one difference though is that this company was newly launched at the time and not created through existing businesses. The company is situated in Stockholm and its main operations are
concerned with search-engine optimization solely focusing on serving business and companies.

Search-engine optimization is a service that has come into play with internet’s expansion. Its main goal is to optimize web pages so that when potential customers or other visitors to the site browse the internet for goods and services as the company provides, the company should end up higher in the result of the search, thus attracting more people to visit their site. An example that better show its usage can be taken from Pineberry’s own website through one of their customers, Cykeloteket. Before having engaged the company their website had produced a result of 100 visitors in may 2007. When Pineberry stepped in and engaged in their business the number of visitors increased to 13000 in the same month in 2008, only to more than double in the year thereafter. These numbers exemplifies well the use for search-engine optimization as the increasing number of visitors holds more potential buyers.

This company has 21 employees and their workforces including the owners are fairly young in comparison to m4. Thus, this is the case its founders have among them previous experiences from successful internet businesses. From this company only one person was willing to participate in our study. This individual is younger than our interviewed persons from m4 and is also “brought up” with the internet; something that we think might make him more used to handle it in his daily life at work. The area of operation for Pineberry is also considerably different than m4 since it sells services directly connected to the internet. This difference we expect will be useful to gain another point of view of the effect of internet since the medium is more centered in the business operations than it is for the m4. Concerning our interviewee, being from a younger generation and raised much closely to internet is something that we also anticipate will affect the answers that we get, something that might guide us to distinguish patterns of similarities or differences. Like m4, Pineberry is situated and operates within Sweden. Thus, the company fulfills this criterion.

The last company we established contact with was the IT-company GetWebbed. This is the oldest company of the three, disregarding the fact that the merging companies at m4 all had previous history of operation. The company was founded in 2000 and has since been providing IT-services. These range from web page creation and running, web advertising and search engine optimization.

While being the oldest company in our study they are also the smallest with two - employees who also share ownership of the company. The company operates from Sweden and has customers both nationally and internationally. This enables them to fulfill our first criteria.

One thing that can be seen even at this point of time is the difference in where these companies operate. While m4 is a user of internet that has another reason for existing, Pineberry and GetWebbed are not only using internet to add support to their business operations but it is also directly linked to the two companies’ existence. While this is a major difference that may have implications for the answers we receive we still want to argue for using companies like this. One of the reasons is that the focus of our study lies on the use of internet as a medium for communication and not operation, and while m4 might not work directly with internet itself in the same way as the other two, the company still uses its services for communicative means. Secondly having companies
within different lines of business allows us to compare differences between them meaning that the result of our thesis takes into consideration differences that can occur due to the different line of businesses. In case we were to use companies only from the same line of business we would not be able to study possible patterns regarding this area. This is an aspect that is important to include since we think, based on our own experience that the line of business can indeed affect how internet is used.

3.6 Criteria Check

When we conducted our interviews we made sure that all interviewees were involved in some kind of relationship creation and building which meant that they all fulfilled our criteria that they had to have customer contact.

In our interview the respondents have answered in their own words. We have chosen to present these answer as only agreeing, disagreeing or not being able to make a statement on the questions. This has been done in order to follow the ethical consideration that we, as authors, should not make our own interpretations from the answers that were given. Which also further is a step to ensure that we stay objective to the answers. Hence, the result becomes both objective and reliable.

We have also kept an interpretivist approach and we have also enabled the respondents to freely express their views on our questions and as such also kept the constructivist criteria.

By doing this we have also fulfilled the quality criteria. As Bell and Bryman (2007, p. 30-32) noted it is not possible to completely eliminate effects from the authors own views and experiences. However taking into account the abovementioned considerations, the authors have tried, in the most possible way, to avoid this from happening.
Chapter 4: Empirical Observations: Qualitative Results

In the empirical section we present the data collected from the interviews. The data was collected through interviews, face-to-face and through telephone as mentioned in the data collection section and were recorded in files later transferred to our computers. In total seven interviews were conducted, four individuals from m4, two individuals from GetWebbed and one interview were conducted with a worker from Pineberry.

As the people we interviewed were different they also responded differently, which also meant that the length of the interviews differed. All together the interviews were between five and fifteen minutes. This does not however include the preparation time and explaining what the interview was about and what topics were to be discussed. If we include the preparation time and explaining time the interview in total was around 30 minutes for each interview. Before the interview we contacted the individuals and explained our work. However the interviewees were not briefed about the actual questions that they would answer. The reason for this being that we did not want them to think about the questions beforehand as this might have affected their answers.

The deciding factor of which method to use for each interview was the availability of the respondent and also the geographical distance. We wanted to be as fast as possible but still get the information that was needed for our study. By doing it this way respect was shown for the interviewees’ time. We did not want to take up a big part of their day since they were kind enough to be a part of our study.

Using the steps from the thematic analysis method we then transcribed these interviews. From these transcriptions this empirical section was created which present the data relevant for our study. This represents step two in the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p.87). While we were interviewing our respondents we were also able to get a good estimation of the line between senior and younger “born” internet users. We chose to draw this line at 35 years of age. This because one of the younger interviewees mentioned that internet became usual in his education meaning that we can assume that under this age people became used to the internet before entering their working life. At the same time some of the seniors have themselves also made a division between age groups fitting this assumption. We have chosen to present the answers from our interviews under our three categories to easier give an overview to the reader. Under these categories we will compile the answers from our seven respondents together which will enable us to easier discuss differences and similarities between the respondents. The three companies that we used were also quite different in their line of business and history. We anticipate that there will be differences in how they use internet which can be associated with the different backgrounds of the companies. Hence we include a section dedicated to present the different companies backgrounds below.
4.1 The Work Our Participants Have

Individual No.1

This individual is 64 years old and situated in Katrineholm. We interviewed him April 7, 2012. This individual is currently working in m4 as a salesman. In his work he takes care of three municipalities in Sweden. Those are Flen, Vingåker and Katrineholm. His work consists of making sure that the partners of m4 get a good outcome of their membership. As a salesman however he works with selling services in the construction and building department. He further tells us that that he works with different clients both companies as well as individuals who want to do have some of their company’s services done at their home.

Individual No.2

This interviewee is one of four working within the company m4. He is 37 years old and situated in Västerås. The interview was conducted on April 24, 2012. The individual is a salesman working in the construction and plant-orientation. His task range from sorting customers after their needs and requests, he also makes visits to existing customers. These customers are mainly bigger building-corporations but also consist of works for smaller building contractors.

Individual No.3

This individual is 44 year of age and currently working as a salesman in m4. The interview was carried out on April 26, 2012. He works in the department of environment and recycling. His work task consists of marketing, selling, both on the phone and visits, and customer care. He explains that the customers he works with are both private and companies. Sometimes the customers are also associations of some sorts.

Individual No.4

The individual is currently working in the company m4’s office in Eskilstuna. He is 63 years old. This interview was conducted on April 3, 2012. At m4 the individual is situated in the company’s operation-development team. Within this, his area of responsibility covers the logistic-linking system, which is, the administrative system used for guiding logistics and services.

This area means that much of the individual’s work-tasks are project-related. Developing the above-mentioned system in different aspects, ensure that it runs smoothly and also implementing new changes as well as troubleshooting and problem solving within the area. The interviewee also mentions that due to his wide experience in the branch (he has been in the same branch for 33 years) he is sometimes also consulted for other areas outside his regular tasks. One example of this is troubleshooting within other system apart from his regular one.

The customers that the interviewee has contact with are other businesses, mainly though the projects he is concerned with. But also in cooperation with businesses within the same branch to jointly solve issues. Although the interviewee has contact with outside clients he highlights that a big part of his contacts also are made within the company and its contractors and employees. Although time is also laid on maintaining the
existing relationships to customers, shareholders and contractors and support these through visits and other forms of contact.

Individual No.5

This individual is currently working in the company Pineberry, he is 32 years of age and his working-place is situated in Stockholm. We made this interview with him on April 22, 2012. Within the company this person works as a search-engine consult, an “expert” position which involves analyzing customers’ web pages and concluding what needs to be done in order to improve it from a search-engine-optimization point of view. He also aids other people within the company with expert-competence and has customer contact with the business’s larger customers. These customers are solely businesses ranging from smaller businesses to some of Sweden’s biggest corporations.

Individual No.6

The interviewee is 33 years old and our first interviewee from the company GetWebbed AB Situated in Umeå. He was interviewed April 26, 2012. Since there are only two people working in this company his tasks may vary from day to day but as he explains it they have divided the tasks between them and his role is more like a Vice President of the company. In his everyday task he works more with the customers then his partner in the company does.

He explains that a lot of his time goes to updating websites. However these tasks can vary from day to day. As an example he can one day do website updating and meeting customer and taking care of the company’s revenue the next. He further discuss that his customers is usually other internet based companies who want to deliver advertisements to them and these are their primary clients. In some cases he does consulting on search-engine optimization on the behalf of other companies. These are mentioned as secondary customers.

Individual No.7

The interviewee is 32 years old and currently working at GetWebbed AB. He was interviewed April 26, 2012. In his work task he is usually managing and updates the servers and does some programming if needed. He explains his tasks more as the technical part of the business. In his work he also manages different customers. This occurs mostly through chat program.

4.2 How Our Participants did Contact and Communicate with New Costumers

From the questions in this category we were able to find out some valuable information. While all our interviewees had the opportunity to choose for themselves which method to use when contacting clients they had different preferences as to which method they preferred adopt and found the most effective. Jointly for the four respondents from m4 was that they all preferred and saw face-to-face meetings as the most effective mean for creating and building relationships. Jointly was also that the interviewees from m4 usually used phone as an initial contact medium but that this was not with the intent of creating a relationship directly. This phone call was made in order to establish a face-to-face meeting where the relationship then could be formed.
Along with this we also got two insinuations worth highlighting, two of the m4 respondents mentioned that the preferred method would probably be different for “younger” individuals who were more adept to the internet medium than themselves being from a “senior” generation. In their experience they had noticed that customers from the younger generations that grew up with internet would preferably use internet as a communication medium rather than face-to-face meetings. From this suggestion we see once again, like the respondents from GetWebbed, that when you use something every day, like in this case grew up with the tool, you would be more likely to use it for communication. As they see it, the participants from the younger generations use internet more commonly and therefore more likely to build and create relationships through internet. This is something the younger generations are used to doing. Also, two individuals from m4 indicated that the preferred method could also be dependent on the line of business of the different parties, this last view was shared with one of the interviewees from GetWebbed who also believed that the line of business would affect the preferred medium to use.

The two individuals from GetWebbed both considered internet as the most effective and preferred method for themselves, this was also the method they used for making contact. They mentioned that they were able to create and have the same kind of relationships with all their customers as any other business. This even though all their communication was conducted through internet. In general we got the impression that these individuals were positive to internet in all aspects.

With the interviewee from Pineberry we got a positive, but different answer than from the interviewees from GetWebbed. This interviewee saw benefits in using internet for contacting the clients. However, he noted that the medium was only used for smaller clients whereas he preferred to use face-to-face meetings with bigger clients. He also noted that the effectiveness in high degree depended on his own role in the process and hence he was unable to deem one medium more effective than another one. In this sense we were unable to get a clear answer from this interview concerning preferred method, or which method he found most effective.

4.3 Our interviewees’ opinions of internet

While all our interviewees felt comfortable with using internet it was evident that its use was different. Out of our four respondents from m4 three answered that they did not use internet as a medium mainly for communication but rather to gather information. All of the four also mention that internet has made communication more effective since it is easier to come in contact with persons with the ability to sending mail to ask for contact in comparison to traditional means. In these cases however, internet was not used as a medium to create and build relationships directly, but rather as a pre-step tool to enable for relationship creation and building to take place. Seeing it as such, three of the respondents from m4 did not believe that internet had made relationship creation or building any easier in itself. The opposite was however the view from the last m4 worker and the respondents from GetWebbed who all believed that internet has made this processes easier. The respondent from Pineberry felt that he was unable to answer this question from his own point of view since internet has always been a part of his environment; however he believed that it had made creation and buildings of relationships easier.
When we asked about how the respondents perceived that a business relationship would be affected if communication was made mainly through internet as a medium we saw similar group divisions. The same three respondents from m4 responded similarly that such relationships would be more frail and shallow in comparison to relationships created and maintained through more traditional means. Sharing this view was also the respondent from Pineberry. Like with the previous question the fourth respondent from m4 together with the two from GetWebbed answered the opposite, meaning that internet communication did not affect the business relationship as it could, with this medium be built upon other factors instead. Hence, they saw no difference in the relationship if it was created and maintained through internet or traditional mediums.

When examining the aspect of trust a similar pattern of division is visible even here. As earlier, the three first respondents from m4 had a similar opinion indicating that internet communication was able to instill some amount of trust. This amount was however less than what was received from traditional mediums. The fourth respondent from m4 answered in the same way as the Pineberry worker that the medium itself was not a source of trust. A third opinion was given by the respondents from GetWebbed who looked at other things within the internet medium to instill trust, examples of this was the response time of a sent mail or the contents itself. Worth noting however is that, these last four respondents experienced no effect on trust by the use of internet for communication as compared to other means.

When we had conducted these seven interviews we could decipher patterns relevant to our study. At this point we could already see the emerging indications that the seven cases could be analyzed and yield rich information. Hence at this point, we reckoned that we had made enough interviews to gain the information that we needed to answer our research question and generate our theory.

4.4 Connection to Methodology

In our research we have chosen interpretivist view meaning, as we showed in section 3.2.1 that we are interested in our participants own views. For us this meant that we also had to leave the questions themselves open for individual interpretation and answer. This also meant that it would not be feasible to ask deep follow up questions as it would mean that we might affect the thought process, and in turn the answer, of or respondent.

One of the risks with this was that we also might stumble upon situations where the respondent did not have a particular view on a question. However we reckon that also not having an opinion is also an answer in itself as the respondent then did not rank the issue of the question as something important in itself.

In the same way, having too specific questions or pushing the respondent towards too specific answer hinders the constructivist view as we as authors would affect the answers meaning that the research would be more leaned towards an objectivist view.
Chapter 5: Analysis

In the analysis chapter we perform our analysis which will be based on the data collected and presented in the empirical part. This will be done by continuing with the steps presented earlier for thematic analysis. By having completed the empirical part we finished the first and second step of the thematic analysis method which include transcribing and familiarizing with the data and present the most relevant data from the transcriptions. Step three and the subsequent step four and five concerns sorting out the data into themes, the themes can then be matched with our data and reveal possible patterns. Finally the last step six will sum up the chapter and present them together with ties to literature which will argue for our findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p.87).

5.1 Analysis Layout

Initially, having completed step 1 and 2 of the thematic analysis method in the previous chapter we have created the following tables 4 and 5 and for the following step three. These tables will enable us to evaluate each question and the responses given by our interviewees and at the same time get clear overview over the basic visible patterns and themes. We have chosen to split the table into two parts where the questions of category 2 and 3 each have their own table. This is made to easier fit the tables in the text. Category 1 is excluded from this part because this category was made in order for us to ensure that we were interviewing the right individuals, hence the information gained here was more relevant for us for this part and also to ease possible anxiousness for the interviewee before we moved on to the questions more related to our subject. There was one piece of information however from the first category that we are going to include in the thematic analysis and this is the age groups, this theme will thus be put together with category 2. We still think that the background of our interviewees might become valuable when we draw our conclusions hence we still include it in this part of the research.

From the tables created from step three of the analysis method we will precede with step four and five in the thematic analysis. These steps include to further refine, name and present themes based on the initial ones from the previous step. This is made in order to single out the data and information from our interviews that is relevant for our research. This will be done in table 6. After we will present and argue for the empirical findings and relevance of these themes, this will also constitute the sixth and final step of the thematic analysis method.

5.2 Analysis Results

As previously mentioned in section 5.1 this section will begin with presenting the first initial themes identified from our data. These will reflect the basic answers of our interviewees to our questions.

As earlier described in the research design chapter and also as seen in the tables below, the first tables will include three different figures that will enable us to see our interviewees view on the question or statement. These are 1, for agreeing with the theme, and 0, for not agreeing with the theme. In some cases a respondent were unable to either support or discard the statement or a theme was mentioned that was not touched upon by the specific individual, for these occurrences we mark the answer with
X. We also like to remind the reader that in this research we are trying to focus on the difference internet makes as a communication medium compared to other, more traditional communication mediums, hence we will single out this effect and not focus on the difference between the traditional mediums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent/Theme</th>
<th>No.1</th>
<th>No.2</th>
<th>No.3</th>
<th>No.4</th>
<th>No.5</th>
<th>No.6</th>
<th>No.7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The respondent is of the younger age category</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to choose method for initial contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses internet as the main medium for contacting new clients.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees internet as the most effective medium for creating and building relationships</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees internet as the most preferred medium for creating and building relationships</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent do not mention age as a possible factor for preferred communication method</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line of business can be a factor for the effectiveness of internet as a communication method</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line of business can be a factor for preferred communication method</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Communication Medium*
**Our interviewees opinions of internet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent/Theme</th>
<th>No.1</th>
<th>No.2</th>
<th>No.3</th>
<th>No.4</th>
<th>No.5</th>
<th>No.6</th>
<th>No.7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee felt comfortable with using internet as a medium for communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet has made communication more effective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using internet has made the process of creating and building relationships easier or harder as compared to before</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation and building of relationships have become easier with use of internet</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The respondent see a difference in a relationship created and maintained through internet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The difference noticed was negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The respondent experienced a difference in the amount of trust in the relationships if it is created and maintained through internet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The difference in trust noticed was negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5: Internet Question*

These tables are also part of the third step of the thematic analysis method which involves sorting the collected data into overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.89). These are visualized with the two different tables above where table 4 contains questions related to both their own choice of preferred communication medium. Table 5 contains questions more specifically aimed at the opinions of internet as a medium for communication when creating and building relationships.

### 5.3 Empirical Findings

To go deeper into this the fourth and fifth steps of the thematic analysis involves to further refine and “re-define” these themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91-92). By doing this we will further see “how” internet is affecting interpersonal relationship and in what areas this effect is noticeable. Using the previous tables 4 and 5 together with the transcribed interviews we have then extracted a number of themes which will yield the information relevant for our research. This involves to further look for patterns in our answers and from this and also rearranging them into themes more directed at answering our question. The results from this process can be seen in table 6 below.
As mentioned, generating these themes is part of the fourth and fifth steps of the thematic analysis method. In this part of the thematic analysis we reviewed the themes we showed in table 4 and 5. By doing this we will can single out and remove themes that do not have enough data to support them. While other themes might come together into one cluster or collapse into two different themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). The meaning of this is to end up with information that is directly answers our research question. Namely “how” internet affects relationship creation and building. This also means that data where our respondents are not able to give a direct answer generating a “0” or a “1” in our table will be eliminated.

**Internet’s positive effects on relationships**

All the interviewees talked about how internet has changed the workplace. Several of the interviewees said that internet has made it faster and more effective to work and come in contact with people in their workplace. That Internet had made building relationships easier was continuously mentioned throughout many interviews generating this particular theme. However, this theme was often mentioned among the younger generation participants while interviewees from the older generation were cautious. The “older generation” interviewees mentioned that they used internet for initial contact with customers and to search for information and later was keener to use face-to-face meetings to create and build relationships.

Another difference that became visible was that the positive effects of IT-based communication mediums were more outspoken among the interviewees who worked in internet-based branches.
Internet’s negative effects on relationships
As the interviews passed on some negative parts about the internet was mentioned. Among the older generation of participants there was a feeling of less trust and connection to the other party when a relationship was solely created and maintained on internet. One interviewee mentioned that the relationship “felt impersonal” when it was created and maintained on the internet. However, this was a difference in opinion compared to the younger generation who saw little to no problem with connecting to and creating relationships through internet. The interviewees thought that one of the main reasons behind this was that the interviewees from the “younger generation” had grown up with internet and was more accustomed to create and build relationship online. Another thing to mention is also that opposite from the positive effects mentioned by our interviewees, the majority of the negative effects came from the people working in non-IT-based companies.

Preference for IT-Based mediums
Internet was usually mentioned as a whole for the IT-based mediums in some cases though the interviewees tended to speak separately about mail. It was also common for the interviewees to also mentioned mobile phone and email as a complements to each other when speaking about the use of internet. When the interviewee was contacting a potential customer or partner initially the use of IT-based communication was used in order to set up the initial customer meeting. The younger generation interviewees also mentioned that IT-based communication mediums were their main part for building and creating business relationships. When interviewees had adopted the IT-based communication medium more in their work, other things were considered in order to instill trust in the business relationship, than those that had been with the traditional mediums. The response time when communication through email or chat was one example that was mentioned by the interviewees.

Preference for Traditional Based mediums
The interviewees from the older generation were keener on using traditional medium for communication with customers. The use of IT-based mediums was limited to mainly search information used to contact the potential customer and set up a face-to-face meeting. The interviewees from the older generation mentioned that a face-to-face meeting instilled more trust than a relationship created and maintained through the internet and that traditional mediums made the relationships stronger. The interviewees from the older generation thought that more traditional based mediums strengthen the relationship more the the IT-based medium. Such features as tone of voice and body language was mentioned as examples of advantages for gaining trust through more traditional mediums was used. As with the positive and negative effects by internet that were mentioned by our interviewees in the sections above a similar division is apparent when it comes for which mediums is preferred. Where the traditional communication mediums were more preferred with the interviewees working in the non-IT-based companies, it was the opposite for the interviewees that did work in companies that were directly IT-based.

The data collected from the interviews suggest that internet does affect interpersonal business relationship, hence supporting the research by Papadopoulou et. al (2001). Again this only states “that” internet affects these processes, but not “how”.

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5.4 Results from Themes

One of the differences we found, compared to earlier research, was that internet was considered a good way, according to our interviewees, to make a first contact with the customer. Once the initial contact had been made face-to-face meeting was set up to further strengthen the business relationship. This is somewhat different from what Gimenez (2000) and Salo (2007) found. Both Gimenez (2008) and Salo (2007) found that a more traditional way to make initial contact was more preferred with the use of a formal letter and when a business relationship had been established a email contact was preferred.

As the data suggest that the trust in the business relationship might suffer depending on which communication medium is being used by the line of business. Similarly to what Feng (2004) experienced half of our interviewees experienced difference in the perceived trust that they would gain from creating and maintaining a relationship with internet as the main medium of communication. In turn this will also, as mentioned by Bell and Loane (2010), result in a difference in the relationship as a whole. One thing that we can conclude from our findings however, is that this negative effect is more frequent with people from the “older generation” who are less accustomed to using internet for relationship creation and building.

The interviewees agreed upon that the internet has made the communication much effective. This supported by Katz, James E (2008) which stated that the key factor of the economic growth over the last two decades was due to information and technology communications. Due to the invention of the IT-based communication mediums the communication with one another has become much more effective.

Our interviewees experienced that business relationships that had been created through internet were affected by the use of the communication medium. The same findings were also noticed by Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) who made a quantitative research which suggested that internet affected the interpersonal relationship. However, from our interviewees we see that this effect was split into two different groups of opinion, whereas some of the interviewees experience the difference as a positive factor whereas other side considers the effects to be a negative one. This insight did not Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) have in their research.

While all our represented companies are either internet-based or have implement internet in their business practices after having been established and running in the pre-internet business world our data also shows that there is a difference in how the users make use of the new technology between the “older” and “younger” users. These findings also reflect similar results to what was found by Akman & Mishra, (2010, p. 488).

In our methodology we mentioned that we were going to take the approach of the interpretivist and constructivist. This meant that we let the interviewees state their answers in their own way without any judgments or revisions. As we note in the data our interviewees have themselves answers the questions in their own words and we have only directly inserted their answer in our tables. Throughout the data collection as well as in the data presentation we have also made sure to stay within the steps of the
thematic analysis method presented by Braun & Clarke (2006) as intended by the authors.

With this we have conducted the steps 3 to 6 of the thematic analysis. From our initial data from the previous chapter we have extracted themes relevant for our thesis which then have been tied to our literature.

5.5 Validation of Analysis

Looking at the analysis chapter, we can see that by using the thematic analysis method we have been able to sort our data into tables that give a simple overview over the relevant patterns detectable in our data. The method has been easy to apply while it also presents results that are understandable and easy to use in the following parts of the research. The method has also allowed us to see patterns that hold relevance in answering our research question.

When we started to actually use the method we followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) advice in the process which meant transcribing the interviews and getting our initial ideas. While this was being done we were extra careful to ensure that nothing was left behind. This meant that our transcriptions were to include everything, this included pauses, expressions, jokes and also parts that might have drifted away a bit from our subject. By doing this we were able to gain a better overview of the person in the interview, the interviewee’s mood, and how, by referring to this also how we should interpret the interviewee’s answers. As mentioned we were, already here, able to detect differences and similarities between our respondents. From this we drew the conclusion that our seven interviews were feasible enough to yield us the data necessary for our thesis.

Having a detailed and exact transcription eased the following process of picking out and compiling the actual data in the empirical section. The data we gained contained rich information relevant to our thesis and the transcriptions were being thoroughly checked numerous times to ensure that we did not leave any relevant data behind.

In the analysis part we created our tables into which we placed our questions and the responses that we had received from our interviewees. This enabled us to get the overview we wanted to easier examine and analyse the data. This step also showed clearer, the different patterns that existed in our data. Hence it enabled us to get results strong enough for the following parts of the thesis.
Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Our Interpretation of the Analysis

While we were working on the first three parts of the thematic analysis method part we detected similarities in our interviewees’ responses. This rendered us to use only three kinds of markings when we conducted the first three parts of the thematic analysis (1, 0, X). Which generated the communication mediums- and Internet questions tables. We elaborated further on the data as a part of the fourth and fifth step in the analysis method and ended up with table 6 and the main themes of our analysis.

In this study we tried to keep the participants in this study as objective as possible as they could be. The participants did not have knowledge of the questions beforehand and therefore could not think about the answers for a long time. This makes the answers spontaneous and they answer in their own way. As mentioned before, the participants that answer the questions resulting in an X in table 4 and 5 could not decide upon an opinion or make a statement on the matter. One of the reason for this could be the matter itself had been thought upon by the respondent. Meaning that it was of no concern for the respondent.

In the communication mediums table 4 we can see a division between the respondents. In most cases similar answers were given by the respondents of the construction company and the computer-based companies respectively. In this sense the table shows incentives, indicating that the line of business which the company operates within can affect how internet is used for communication and perceived by its users.

Four out of seven interviewees said that creating a business relationship has become easier as internet has evolved. As mentioned previously Cann (1998) argued that a business relationship is preferable when the benefits exceeds the risk for both parties. One might argue that these benefits have been growing stronger with the continuously growth of internet and in turn are closing the gap for when the benefits exceeds the risks.

That the line of business affects how internet is used is something that we, as mentioned before, view as a possibility. It should be noted that this is something we did not know beforehand. We only knew that it could be a possibility. We chose however not ask any question in this regard, similarly we asked no questions with regards to how the line of business in which the company operated in could affect the effectiveness of internet as a medium of communication. The reason for this is that we wished to affect the thinking process as little as possible for our interviewees. As such, what the interviewee chose to mention in his answer are things that this individual himself considers relevant for the topic. Hence, when a few of the interviewees mentioned line of business on their own accord it indicates that this area is a valuable factor for this specific individual. As seen in from the communication mediums table though, one individual chose however to bring up line of business as a possible factor for the preferred communication method, supporting our opinion that the effect of internet on business relationships could be different in different line of businesses. This pattern tells us that depending on what line of business the company operates within the application of internet in the company’s practices may differ. GetWebbed used the internet as their main communication
method. They used the internet both for communicating with customers as upholding different relationship they had with different businesses.

Meanwhile m4 used the internet mainly for getting in touch with their targeted companies. After the initial contact had been established the communication was mainly through telephone or face-to-face meetings. Both of these companies are in different lines of businesses. This pattern is something we saw throughout our data.

Three out of four respondents from m4 describe that they used internet only when getting in touch with their customer and later conducting the very first meeting face-to-face. From what we notice from our respondents from m4 was that the company is in such branch that requires you to build business relationships in person. From what they told us it was important to get a view of the person they are doing business with. This was because, as they thought, you would get a better trust in the relationship in face-to-face meeting the online communication.

We reasoned mainly in the same way with regards to questions that required the individual to compare his age with others as we want to see what the individual himself find as valuable factors when answering the questions. Another reason is that we recognize that not everyone feels comfortable with comparing his own age with others. As we do not wish for our interviewees to feel discomfort during the interview we thus exclude asking directly upon this area as well. We did however inform all our respondents that people from different age groups were going to participate in our research. Although we did not ask directly on this area two individuals still chose to mention age as a factor for the preferred communication method.

Both of the individuals who mentioned age directly as a factor for the preferred communication method were from the senior group, they were also the two oldest among our interviewees. This occurrence gives us the view that their experience of both pre-internet business and internet-business environments along with the overview of how this development has progressed over time allows them to consider age as an important factor. Additional support that this experience holds value for the answering of the questions is also given by respondent No. 5. When we later asked about whether or not internet has affected the ease of creating and building relationships as compared to the pre-internet environment the respondent answered that he was unable to answer this question. The reason for this was that due to his age, internet had always been a part of his working environment and as such he lacked experience from when internet was not around in the communication. These results indicate that the age of our respondents also makes difference in how they relate to the medium; hence it confirms the assumption of Akman & Mishra (2010).

Regarding the other areas which table touches upon the answers were, as mentioned, divided between the line of business in which the individual was situated. The individuals within the computer-based companies were adapting internet in more processes concerned with business relationships compared to the individuals in the construction company. From this table we can see that there are distinct differences between the two lines of businesses, but that within them, the individuals had similar opinions.
From the information gathered from the internet questions in table 5 we can see that there is a tendency for the senior and the younger users of the internet to have a difference in the way they use internet as a tool.

The difference in how internet was used was also visible when we asked whether they thought that internet had made relationship creation and building any different. While the senior members perceived that it had become easier this was only in the way of “establishing contact” by using internet as a tool to reach individuals. However, apart from respondent No.4 the respondents from m4 all perceived that relationships created through internet created weaker and shallower relationships and preferred using additional mediums as to strengthen these. This, while the younger respondents saw no trouble with using it solely internet for this task. Our two respondents from GetWebbed especially, did not experience any difference that would affect the relationship with using internet. From this we see that different individuals experience internet’s effects differently. A reason for this difference can also be argued for by the results from our 6th table which shows that age might affect how internet is experienced. As we mentioned in the beginning that “being born” and more adapt to use the medium could make individuals keener to use it.

The difference might as well be due to the difference in branch but from the interviews we also see tendencies that the need for a relationship when doing business also seems to differ. While the respondents from m4 seemed to see great value in building good relationships the respondents from GetWebbed did not share this need as long as the business deal was sealed. Thus, we can argue that the need for an actual relationship was smaller for these respondents. If this is the case it further strengthens supports our view that, what branch the company acts in has a significant role for determining for what kind of usage the company has of the internet. While the respondents of GetWebbed did not see any value in having a physical closeness to their partners, the respondents from m4 had a different view on this matter. For them getting to know and meeting clients was crucial to create a good business relationship. As mentioned, Florida (2005) concluded that such physical closeness generated benefits that could be valuable for businesses. From our research we can see that the physical closeness to business partners is valuable even for individuals on the business market. But this is not a benefit sought by everyone. Still, we sympathize with Florida’s (2005) research and argue that depending on which branch you are in, physical closeness can indeed strengthen business relationships.

When we presented the question about if the internet has made the process for relationship building and creation better or easier we got some differences in our results. Respondents No. 1 and No.2 from m4 did not see anything that indicates that it would had made any difference in the relationship building and creation. However, No.3 to No. 7 all saw that in had made some kind of difference that would indicate that it had made the process of relationship building and creation easier or harder.

Since we know that it had made a difference according to No. 3 to No. 7 we further questioned if they thought it had made it easier and they all answered yes. This indicates that their view was that the process of relationship building and creation has made it easier with the use of internet. No.1 and No.2 could not answer this question since they did not think that the process has become easier or harder with the use of internet.

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However, in comparison to the previous questions almost all of our respondents saw a difference in the relationship if the relationship was maintained and created through the internet.

When we asked our respondents how they felt that trust was affected by the internet as a medium we could see a similar division as before. The responses we got from the three salesmen at m4 and the interviewee from Pineberry was that trust was affected, although they did not specifically deem that the trust got “worse” or “better” by communication being done through internet, they did however note that other means, such as face-to-face generated higher trust. For this reason we have, in the table regarding the answers as trust being affected negatively as there is an incentive that they would gain “higher” trust through traditional mediums. As Kleinaltenkamp, M et al. (2014) argue as the relationship grows stronger the satisfaction, trust and a well established process becomes vital in order for the business relationship to stay stable. One might thus argue that the business relationships where the difference in trust might be lower due to the use of internet as a communication medium will become less stable than it would have if the communication was made through traditional mediums.

However, the respondents from GetWebbed had found other ways of gaining trust through internet which did not occur in the answers we got from the other respondents. Thus for these two individuals, the new ways of gaining trust replaced the traditional methods. This was because they experienced that the amount of trust gained through these new ways was equal to what they would gain from using traditional mediums. From what we can see the pattern that emerges is that the source of the trust is what changes. The interviewees from GetWebbed saw different sources in which the amount of trust was increased. They saw response time, formulations in an email and availability in chat forums as their source of trust when having a business relationship. Meanwhile the people at m4 and Pineberry saw facial expressions, tone of voice, body language and such as their source of trust. All of these companies feel they have good business relationships with their partners. As they stated it is not “better” or “worse” for the one source or the other. The source of the trust is just different.

In our introduction we mentioned Papadopoulou et. al (2001) who concluded that the transfer from the physical to virtual world would affect how trust was generated. From our result GetWebbed has made such shift as to where their sources for trust were. Hence, based on what we have done we confirm Papadopoulou et. al’s (2001) in an everyday situation.

From the results in the later parts of the analysis method we could from our final themes also see that there were both positive and negative effects from using IT-based mediums as well as different preferences in which kind of medium our interviewees preferred. However we could also see that the main difference between these considerations were divided between the age category of interviewees. While all interviewees viewed internet as a usable tool for communication it’s more positive aspects and a preference for using it for communication was more appreciated by our younger interviewees while the “older” interviewees did detect some negative effects and rather preferred using more traditional mediums.
6.2 Summary of Discussion

From the results we see a tendency which indicates that what branch the company act in makes a difference in how they use internet to communicate with other companies. In the company m4 the respondents No.1-4 answered similarly to our questions enabling us to put these individuals into one cluster. Similarly, the respondents No.5-7 who all worked in lines of businesses directly related to internet had adopted internet in more processes than the other respondents. They had similar answers within their line of business which allow us to put these individuals together creating a separate cluster.

Thus, from the beginning we started out with seven individuals which all used IT-based mediums in some way for communication when creating and building relationships. From these we have detected similarities and differences which enable us to sort them into two clusters. The effect of internet on creation and building of interpersonal business relationships differ significantly between these clusters. This pattern is not something we knew beforehand. Only something we believed could be a possibility.

For the individuals in the first cluster internet was mainly considered as a complementary tool which was not used directly for business relationship creation and building. Hence internet’s effect on these areas were less visible here than for the computer-based companies where internet had been adopted into more processes. From what we understood however, internet had made the communication within a business relationship more effective which enabled information to be sent, received and acted to more efficient without affecting the interpersonal relationship itself.

For the second cluster which included individuals No. 5-7 there was a different result. These individuals were actively using internet as a replacement for traditional mediums which includes phone, face-to-face meeting and letters. They also, like the individuals from m4, perceived that internet has made communication within relationships faster and more effective. Internet was used as a main medium for building and creation of relationships, in some cases even without any involvement from the traditional mediums. While this was the case, the individuals themselves did not notice any difference in the relationships they created with internet as compared to the ones created through traditional mediums. A difference noted however was the source of trust in the relationships. While they experienced that the relationships themselves had not changed the source of the trust within them had. While the respondents from m4 relied on sources as tone of voice and body language of their clients the respondents in the second cluster gained trust in their business relationships from the response time of emails and the formulation of the replied messages. Hence, for the individuals in this second cluster internet has changed the way relationships are created and build without changing the meaning of the business relationship. Jointly for both clusters however was that experienced that internet has made communication more efficient. As mentioned in the literature review, examining if the individuals who worked with internet experienced that it had made building business relationships and communicating with other companies more efficient for than before. From our result we can establish that is has made it more efficient.

Going back to our initial research question we set out to study how internet affected business relationships creation and building from the experiences of those who uses it.
From our two clusters we can see that the answer to this question can differ depending on which line of business the individual is working in.

For the individuals in the first cluster internet was not used in relationship creation and building and hence, it had no direct effect on these processes. It did however increase the efficiency of transmitting information between individuals. For the second cluster where internet had been implemented to a greater extent it was also used directly in creation and building relationships. While there were little effect on the already established and maintenance of the relationships themselves the greatest effect was the sources of the trust in the relationships. These sources had been replaced with new ones as compared to the sources gained from traditional mediums.

From this discussion we argue that depending on how internet is used within the business the sources of trust will differ. The difference in use of internet could also be seen between different lines of businesses. To illustrate this difference we present the following two images which show how the sources of trust differ between our two clusters.

![Traditional Sources of Trust](image)

**Figure 4: Traditional Trust Sources**

This image illustrates the sources of trust for the cases in the first cluster. The individuals herein rely heavily on traditional mediums to gain trust within their relationships. As such the sources of trust will also be traditional; body language, tone of voice, facial expressions. These sources rely on face-to-face meetings or phone-communication for creation and building of interpersonal relationships, the kind that were preferred by the individuals in the first cluster. The second figure introduces what we chose to call the “new sources of trust”.

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These new sources of trust erupt when the individual uses mainly internet as the medium for building relationships, they include two different sources; the response time of e-mails and the formulation of the e-mails themselves. These sources were found among the individuals in the second cluster. The method used for gaining trust was different from the traditional mediums which also affected the sources of the same.

With these figures we propose that the sources from where trust is gained can differ between individuals. As earlier mentioned in the discussion we also saw differences between the different line of businesses that our interviewees were working in and which mediums they used. Although this difference in sources of trust was not noticed by the individuals themselves we argue that this difference is evident in our study. We thus propose that further studies upon this subject can be done in order to see whether or not these different sources of trust is present among other companies as well as in other line of businesses. It should also be recognized that this study is based on specific cases and might not be the same for all business in these segments. We propose that quantitative studies should be made to ascertain this as a general pattern.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Research Question

In this research we set out to investigate how employees use internet as a medium and how it affects creation and building of interpersonal business relationships. The study was conducted through a comparative case study approach where we selected three companies within different line of businesses. From these we interviewed seven individuals of different ages which all utilized internet for communication with clients in some way.

Through the interviews we have gathered data related to our research question. This data have then been examined and analyzed with a thematic analysis method. The analysis lead to the creation of multiple tables, table 4 and table 5. From these two tables we created four different themes. These themes were put in table 6 and based on these we were able to answer our research question.

From our study we draw the conclusion that internet does not affect how interpersonal business relationships are created and built from the perceptions of its employees. However, looking further into the details it became evident that the use of internet had affected how trust was gained within the relationship. However, how it affects differ depending on the line of businesses in which the individual is situated in. In all of our companies internet had become implemented, however the way that it was used differed between the different businesses. This pattern that different lines of business could reveal different answers is not something we knew in the beginning of our study.

7.2 Our Different Clusters

In our first cluster internet was not considered as a medium that was used for creating and building relationships. Although it had communicative uses within and outside the company walls its main use was to transfer information to existing business contacts were a relationships had already been established. For the actual creation and building of relationships the individuals in the company still relied on more traditional mediums.

In our second cluster, the corporations were both internet based, working with internet was their practice and thus to use it as a communication medium followed naturally. These individuals relied on internet not only for running their business but also for creating and building new interpersonal business relationships as well. In this cluster internet’s effect on the business relationships themselves also small. A significant difference however was that although the individuals did not notice any difference in the relationships themselves, the source from where trust, which is an important factor in a relationship, was generated had changed.

The individuals in the first cluster relied on body language and tone of voice when they were generating trust through the traditional mediums. The individuals in the second cluster which did not use traditional mediums had started to rely on other sources, such as the formation of written emails or the response time for trust. This meant that for these individuals the creation and building of relationships had changed since the relationships sprouted from new sources.
7.3 Answer to Research Question

From our analysis we have been able to detect patterns that have enabled us to answer our research question. We have shown that internet has the possibility to affect how trust is gained within an interpersonal relationship. Our findings also show that this effect differ between different lines of businesses in the cases that we examined. It also became evident that the effect internet had on the trust in relationships was not noticed by the individuals themselves.

Based on these grounds we propose is that, “Internet does not affect how business relationships are built or created from the perception of the users. While it does however change the sources of trust in the relationship creation and building, this change is however not always noticeable by the users within the relationship. The change inflicted on the business relationships by internet is also dependent on the line of business.”

This statement is made from a research where two different lines of businesses have been examined and compared. Hence, we propose that scientific testing of this statement will be made by using two or more different line of businesses that incorporates internet in their business relationship practices. Through though the generation of this statement we found that the part affected in relationships was how trust was gained. Our opinion is that testing of this can be made through a quantitative survey focused on this specific part.
Chapter 8: Limitations and Further Studies

8.1 Limitations

Conducting this research we had some limitations that we needed to acknowledge. The first limitation we saw was the time limit with conducting the interviews. As mentioned before we did not want to impose that much in the interviewees’ time. This meant that our questions had to be short while also enabling us to gather the information needed for our study.

There was also a limited amount of companies willing to participate in our study. This meant that we had to adapt our research to mainly focus on a few selected companies. Those were m4, Pineberry and GetWebbed AB. However, when selecting these companies we tried to get different branches and companies that had different use of internet.

By enabling the interviewee in to answer the questions in their own words we manage to get “their own view”. However this also meant that one limitation was when a participant was unable to convey their view. We did not get a definitive answer. One example of this was the quiet participant from GetWebbed.

If you look at other researchers most of the authors choose to define trust themselves (Bamberger, 2010). Since there are a lot of definitions of trust we note that someone who makes a similar study as our study will maybe define trust in a different way and get a different result.

8.2 Further Studies

Our study has studied how employees use internet and how it affects creation and building of interpersonal business relationships. By doing this we find out that:

“Internet does not affect how business relationships are built or created from the perception of the users. While it does however change the sources of trust in the relationship creation and building, this change is however not always noticeable by the users within the relationship. The change inflicted on the business relationships by internet is also dependent on the line of business.”

What this tells us is that it does not matter whether or not you use internet in the creation or building of a business relationship. It does however change the source from where trust is gained in the business relationships. This depends on if the user uses the new or the traditional mediums of trust.

As mentioned in chapter 6 we propose that further studies could be done to see whether the sources of trust would change depending on what line of business you are acting in. What we suggest can be done in further studies of this subject is to test whether these sources of trusts that we found would be able to apply those other lines of business as well, apart from those we used in our study. With the new information the researcher could compare whether this was in fact something that was applicable to other lines of
business as well. Does the pattern evolve or stay the same depending on different lines of businesses? Evaluating this is something we could be done in further studies.

A way to measure and perform this test or analysis is by using a semi-structured survey where the respondent would be handed a set of question with an open answer on the subject. This opened answer would let the respondent answer the question in their own way, similar to a semi-structured interview. The data would then be accumulated and used later in an analysis to measure whether it would change the sources of the trust in a business relationship.

Apart from further testing the result of our research, we think that further studies can also be done in subjects closely related to our own. Depending on the goal of the study one can argue that it is possible to categorize our interviewees in two possible ways. It is possible to divide our employees into two groups by basing it on the line of business of the individuals, which we have done. If one chooses to do a deeper research there is also possible to sort the individuals based on their roles, creating three clusters.

Therefore our statement might be useful for researchers who will/might conduct a study in a similar field as ours. As mentioned the researcher might choose to divide the participants into three or more cluster instead of our two. Also if the researcher wants to compare different branches our statement will become helpful.

Our statement might also prove valuable to other fields or branches. The result shows that the effects that IT-based mediums have on creating and building interpersonal relationships can differ between both the individuals and the branch in which the company itself operate. Based on this, considerations can be taken when deciding how the medium is to be used as such increasing the benefits and avoiding the negative effects. This would mean that the company could bring the most out of the medium.

From both the Communication Medis- and the Internet Questions tables we saw information that indicated that, what kind of role the interviewee had in the company made a difference in how they answered our questions. We saw that we can categorize them into two groups. Group one was interviewee number No. 1-No. 4, group two was interviewee No. 5 and No. 7. We have in our study taken age into consideration and discussed around the implications of age difference. This division has enabled us to make a separation between “younger” and “senior” internet users. However, we anticipate that further research on this matter can be done in this aspect to deeper see the effect of ages.

Why this could have any meaning to our study is because our opinion is that since “younger” generation has grown up with the tool ever since they were born they will be more comfortable to use it later in line of business. Meanwhile, the “senior” group which has grown up without this medium might not see it as obvious to use it in their line of business. They might consider things that the “younger” generation is not. Depending on norms and values which might differ from the experience when growing up. For instance the “younger” generation use tools to communication through internet all the time grown up and might be, as said before, more comfortable to use the medium.
It is clear that internet has come a long way since its creation and it is constantly developing. When our interviewees spoke about internet communication they have mainly referred to this as written communication through mail or chat, although the respondents were able to consider even other forms of internet communication.

However, as Bell and Loan (2010) discussed, new forms of communication through internet are emerging. Among these are methods which do not rely on written communication, such as video conferencing. In areas where these are more used it is possible to investigate if internet’s effect on business relationships is different from our results.
Chapter 9: Reference List


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Appendix 1

Questions Used in Interviews

What kind of work description did our participants have?

1. What is your role in the company?

2. What are your working-tasks?

3. What kind of clients are you working with?

How our participants did contact and communicate with new costumers?

4. How do you make contact with new clients?

5. Are you, yourself able to decide which method to use when you are contacting new clients or do you have a certain procedure/policy to follow?

6. Which tool for establishing contacts with clients do you prefer (phone, meetings internet, etc.)?

7. Which tool for establishing contacts with clients do you find most effective?

Our Interviewees Perception of Internet

8. How do you feel about using internet as a medium for communication with clients?

9. Do you perceive that internet has made it easier or harder to create and build business-relationships?

10. Do you perceive that there occurs any difference in the interpersonal relationships that are formed/maintained through internet in comparison to other methods (phone, meetings internet, etc.)?

11. From a personal perspective, do you experience that your trust in the relationship with a business-contact is affected by the use of internet for communication?

12. If it affects, then how?