

# Engaging Publics Through Social Media

**A Study of How NetCom and Altibox  
Communicate to Create Engagement on Facebook**

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Master Thesis in Nordic Media  
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## Abstract

Engagement has emerged as an important concept in public relations, especially in the context of organizations' increasing social media presence. Through social media, organizations rely on engaging users to interact and communicate with them, to further build and cultivate relationships with individuals, or groups it depends on. However, the concept of engagement has so far suffered from a lack of research, a clear theoretical definition and conceptualization.

This master thesis seeks to explore the so far ambiguous concept of engagement in the field of public relations, through a qualitative study of how NetCom and Altibox communicate to create engagement with publics on Facebook. Drawing on Maureen Taylor and Michael Kent (2014), I follow their conceptualization of engagement, where they argue that engagement is a part of dialogue and that it is through engagement and dialogue one can build and maintain mutual and beneficial relationships with publics. Based on this framework, I have analyzed how NetCom and Altibox communicate to create engagement on Facebook. The analysis shows that NetCom and Altibox apply four strategies to create engagement on their Facebook pages: they facilitate interaction, they aspire for participation, they commit to conversations, and they use attentive and personal communication. It is further argued that NetCom and Altibox seem to have established Facebook pages as communities where publics at a high level interact with the companies, but that they however do not appear to achieve dialogic engagement to its full extent. An interesting question is if it is even possible to achieve engagement as Taylor and Kent conceptualizes it. Social media has created a paradigm shift in how organizations communicate, and appears to both offer opportunities and challenges for organizations that want to create engagement. Therefore, I hope that this thesis can provide an understanding of, or an insight to, engagement as a concept in social media and public relations.

## Preface

I want to start by saying that writing this thesis has been an incredibly exciting journey. It has been an instructive and inspiring process, but also challenging, and at times frustrating. I feel privileged to have had this opportunity, and personally and academically grown a lot with this project. Not least, it has been very exciting to have the opportunity to research public relations and engagement in social media, a relatively unexplored topic.

Thank you to everyone who has helped to make this thesis possible.

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Oslo, November 7, 2015

Thea-Sofie Koren Brekke

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	<i>Background .....</i>	2
1.2	<i>Research Question.....</i>	4
1.3	<i>Structure of the Thesis.....</i>	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Theory.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1	<i>Engagement and Dialogue .....</i>	8
2.1.1	Towards a Definition of Engagement .....	9
2.1.2	Dialogue in Public Relations.....	11
2.1.3	The “how to” Approach: Dialogic Engagement.....	14
2.1.4	Criticism of Dialogue Theory .....	17
2.2	<i>Social Media.....</i>	19
2.2.1	What is Social Media?.....	20
2.2.2	Social Networking Sites .....	21
2.2.3	Situating Engagement in Social Media .....	24
2.2.4	Antecedents of Online Engagement.....	27
2.2.5	Social Media: New Challenges .....	29
2.3	<i>Summary.....</i>	31
<b>3</b>	<b>Methods .....</b>	<b>32</b>
3.1	<i>Qualitative Case Study.....</i>	32
3.2	<i>Qualitative Content Analysis.....</i>	33
3.2.1	Selection of Data .....	34
3.2.2	Processing and Analysis of Data.....	35
3.3	<i>Qualitative Interviews .....</i>	36
3.3.1	Interview Subjects .....	37
3.3.2	Performing and Transcribing Interviews.....	38
3.4	<i>Research Quality.....</i>	39
3.4.1	Reliability .....	40
3.4.2	Validity.....	42
3.4.3	Generalizability .....	44
3.4.4	Ethics.....	45
3.5	<i>Summary.....</i>	47

**4 Analysis and Findings: Strategies for Engagement ..... 48**

4.1 *NetCom and Altibox in Social Media*..... 48

4.1.1 NetCom ..... 49

4.1.2 Altibox..... 51

4.2 *They Facilitate Interaction*..... 52

4.2.1 The Platform’s Openness ..... 53

4.2.2 Facebook’s Interactive Features ..... 56

4.3 *They Aspire for Participation*..... 61

4.3.1 Offer “Help” ..... 61

4.3.2 Convey Appealing and Useful Information ..... 65

4.4 *They Commit to Conversations* ..... 71

4.4.1 Respond to Inquiries..... 72

4.4.2 Maintain Conversations..... 76

4.5 *They Use Attentive and Personal Communication*..... 81

4.5.1 Attentive Responses ..... 81

4.5.2 Personal Communication and Appearance ..... 86

**5 Conclusion ..... 91**

5.1 *Summary of Findings* ..... 91

5.2 *Theoretical and Methodological Reflections* ..... 96

5.3 *Possibilities for Further Research* ..... 99

**Literature List ..... 101**

**Appendix A ..... 108**

**Appendix B ..... 111**

# 1 Introduction

Public relations is a communication activity that seek to identify and explain the complexity of communication and relationships (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Coombs and Holladay define public relations as, “the management of mutually influential relationships within a web of constituency relationships” (2010: 4). Over the past years, *engagement* has emerged as an important concept in public relations. This is due to the increasing focus on authentic stakeholder involvement and, “(...) as stakeholders challenge the discourse of organizational primacy” (Johnston, 2014: 381). Public relations is a communication activity, which helps organizations to engage with stakeholders and publics (Taylor & Kent, 2014). On this basis, engagement can be understood as an underlying principle of public relations. The term engagement is frequently used in the academic and professional fields of public relations, where it is considered to give beneficial results for organizations (Kang, 2014). Engagement is what motivates publics or stakeholders’ benevolent interactions, their commitment or dedication towards an organization, or a group, and its communication. It is a multidimensional concept that enables and strengthens organizational relationships, and promotes community-organization interaction (Johnston, 2014: 381).

Through the revolution of social media, the concept of engagement has gained an increasing amount of attention (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2014); “Particularly, with the emergence of social media, stakeholders have increasingly utilized this new form of communication as a critical tool of public engagement with organizations” (Kang, 2014: 399). Engagement in social media is most commonly viewed as the organization’s interactions with publics (Taylor & Kent, 2014). On an organization’s Facebook page, for example, the organization and publics can join the conversation and engage each other on a personal and social level. “Social media allows for communication to be interactive, [...] participatory, collaborative, personal, and simultaneously communal, thus allowing organizations to engage publics in constant conversations, supportive behaviors, and meaningful relationships” (Men & Tsai, 2014: 418), more so than traditional media like newspapers, television and books. Social media is believed to recreate direct and human communication, and engagement is therefore seen as a natural fit, as scholars idealize and argue this form of communication to create engagement (2014).

Despite engagement's increasing popularity, existing research and literature on the subject is insufficient and lacking any form of conceptualization (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Usually, information regarding why we should engage, what engagement actually is or how to do it, is vaguely given, or does not exist at all. Moreover, scholars and professionals in the field of public relations all use the term differently, demonstrating an inconsistent fundamental understanding of the concept, although there seems to be a mutual agreement that engagement is important and "good". Essentially, very little research is done on what it actually means to engage (Johnston, 2014; Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

## **1.1 Background**

Since the emergence of social media, it has become a powerful public relations tool. As social media platforms have grown bigger, proved by their large masses of users, organizations have grown to acknowledge these environments as a beneficial place to be, and to interact and create engagement with publics. The number of people using social media and its big potential for outreach are the main aspects when looking at the platforms through the eyes of professional communicators (Haugseth, 2013). For example, in February in 2014, the Guardian reported that the social networking site Facebook had gained 1.23 billion monthly active users by the end of 2013 (Kiss, 2014). Social media platforms represent millions of people all gathered in one place and have therefore established a new arena for interaction and communication between organizations and stakeholders. Organizations report that, through social media, they are able to reach a much larger and diverse audience than before (Ihlen, 2013).

It is clear that social media has challenged traditional media as a platform for communication, and are setting new guidelines for how organizations communicate. Compared to traditional media, often controlled by organizations, social media is user-centered. Here individual users become media gatekeepers and create the content, where they "collaboratively and proactively engage with companies through 'likes', 'posts', and 'shares' within their personal and social networks" (Men & Tsai, 2014: 417). As a result, social media has changed how information or content regarding organizations is created, distributed and used. A shift in power has happened, where an organization's image and reputation is no longer defined by the organization or its communicators, but by stakeholders' online networks (Men & Tsai, 2014: 417).



As organizations increasingly use social media as a communication channel to interact with publics, social media communication has been a subject of extensive research. Dialogue has particularly been proclaimed as a prominent approach to social media, as both public relations scholars and practitioners keep pointing to the arena's potential for relationship-building with stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ihlen 2013; Ihlen & Levenshus, in press; Kent, 2010, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Further and as already mentioned, it is precisely through the increased focus on social media and communication that the concept of engagement has received increased attention. Men and Tsai quote Edelman stating that the revolution of social media has called for "a paradigm shift from public relations to public engagement to emphasize the complex process of debate, discussion, and interaction between publics and organizations" (Men & Tsai, 2014: 417). Moreover, dialogue theorists Maureen Taylor and Michael Kent argue that engagement is a part of dialogue, and that it is through engagement and dialogue one can build and maintain mutual and beneficial relationships with publics (2014).

However, as I mentioned initially, there seems to be an academic and practical confusion around the concept of engagement in social media. Existing literature describe engagement in social media as an asymmetrical communication process, where organizations use one-way communication with their "followers" or "friends" (Kang, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). In addition, although most organizations are trying to utilize social media's opportunities for relationship development, research conducted shows that organizations are not fully tapping social media's potential for dialogue, and relationship-building; one-way communication is the dominating form (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ihlen, 2013; Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009).

Nevertheless, there are some examples where companies seem to have cracked the code, and are having success with how they have chosen to adapt to the new media landscape. NetCom and Altibox, two of the largest telecommunication companies in Norway, are two of those. In Norway, both companies are acknowledged for their use of social media. Among others, they have been awarded for their social media strategy (see "Gulltaggen" 2010). Moreover, NetCom's Facebook page, called "Make the most of Netcom", was awarded "Facebook page of the year" in 2011, and they were acknowledged as one of the finalists for the same price in 2013 (Fossbakken, 2012). Altibox was awarded for best customer service on social media in

2014 (Fossbakken, 2014), and in 2015 they were acknowledged as “the best social media organization” (Altibox, 2015). They were also one of the finalists of the title “Facebook page of the year” in 2012 (Fossbakken, 2012). NetCom and Altibox decided both at an early stage to be present in social media, and strategically defined an approach to their use of the platforms. Among others, the companies have decided to use social media as a channel for customer service, where they actively communicate with social media users regarding topics concerning their products, services or brand. On Facebook, for example, NetCom has almost 112 000 total page likes and Altibox has almost 96 000. Making Facebook a place where they are able to reach and interact with a large audience, and where they depend on successful communication. Presumed that NetCom and Altibox are acclaimed prominent users of social media, this thesis will focus on NetCom and Altibox, as cases to further understand the concept engagement in social media.

## **1.2 Research Question**

An organization’s success relies on creating a propitious foundation for relationships with people, organizations, systems, or groups that the organizations depends on (Ihlen, 2013; Ledingham, 2009). Organizations are therefore dependent on communicating with the outside world to be viable in today’s society, and to reach goals, because relationships occur through communication (Just, Jensen, Grønning, & Merckelsen, 2007). These people, groups, organizations or systems are most commonly referred to as *stakeholders* or *publics* within public relations practice and theory (Ihlen, 2013). These concepts will be further explained further. The user-generated social media has created new challenges for organizations and how they communicate with stakeholders and publics. In social media, organizations rely on stakeholders or publics’ choice of who they want to interact with. Here, organizations have to work to win their interest, attention, and create foundation for relationships, in a universe of millions, or even billions, of other users. Therefore, I argue that organizations rely on being able to create engagement with stakeholders or publics, and a successful form of communication, in order to survive, reach goals, and build relationships, in the new media sphere.

As initially mentioned, there has previously been made few attempts to clarify the concept of engagement. A conceptualization and discussion of engagement in regard to what it is, how to do it or why, has been lacking in public relations research and literature. Furthermore, social

media is claimed to be a prominent place to create engagement (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014), however research shows that the technology's possibilities are under-utilized by organizations (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). Because of (1) the lacking understanding of engagement as a concept in public relations, (2) social media's emergence as a powerful communication arena, and (3) that there appears to be confusion among organizations regarding how they should communicate in this growing sphere, the need for further research regarding these topics are apparent. On this basis the aim for this thesis is to investigate how NetCom and Altibox, two organizations acknowledged for their use of the technology, communicates to create engagement in social media. There has been, as far as I could find, made few attempts of research seeking to conceptualize how companies communicate to create engagement in social media. Hence, my research question is:

*How do NetCom and Altibox communicate to create engagement with publics on Facebook?*

Recently, or more precisely in November 2014, the *Journal of Public Relations Research* dedicated a special issue to the concept of engagement. This special issue's purpose was to contribute to an understanding of, the so far ambiguous, concept of engagement in the field of public relations (Johnston, 2014). To answer the research question I have presented, discussed and used theory of engagement, mainly presented in articles in this issue, to try to identify how NetCom and Altibox create engagement on their Facebook pages. This is because previous literature, research or conceptualizations on engagement in social media were either limited, or non-existent. Moreover, in the article "Dialogic Engagement: Clarifying Foundational Concepts" presented in this issue, the authors, Taylor and Kent, approach engagement in relation to *how* organizations can create it with publics, and as already mentioned, argue that dialogue and engagement are interdependent. Since my thesis also seeks to understand *how* two companies create engagement with publics, this article and dialogue theory has been an important contribution to my research. Dialogue theory is therefore presented and discussed to understand engagement, and how one can communicate to create it. In addition, I have retracted relevant theory of social media to build a theoretical framework for my research question.

Moreover, this thesis is a case study, where I have chosen to use a qualitative analysis of Altibox and NetCom's communication on their Facebook pages. Because of the time available, and scope of the thesis, I have chosen to focus primarily on a given timeframe, and on one social media platform. The reason I have chosen Facebook is based on the sites

popularity, compared to other social media sites, both in number of users and presence of organizations (Høgberg, 2014; Kiss, 2014), and also that this is where NetCom and Altibox have the largest number of “followers” or “page-likes”. In addition, I have chosen to perform interviews with representatives responsible for social media, from the two companies, to gain insight to the companies own thoughts, experience, goals and strategies of engagement on their Facebook pages.

Also, as presented in the research question, I have chosen to focus on the concept publics, when referring to whom NetCom and Altibox relate to or communicate with, to create engagement. The reason for my choice is to designate the audience of the companies’ communication. This is based on the assumption that engagement in social media requires a degree of interaction and communication, and is based on an existing relationship, between the organization and whom they create engagement with (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Moreover, Taylor and Kent also adhere to the term publics in their attempt to define engagement (2014). The stakeholder definition is broader than the definition of publics, and refer to anyone that has a “stake” in the organization, being anyone that can be, or are influenced by the organization (Just et al., 2007). Publics, on the other hand, can be identified as stakeholders who acknowledge their common interests and decide to act on it in some way, and actively respond to the organization’s actions and beliefs (Ihlen, 2013; Just et al., 2007). On this basis, stakeholders are latent publics (Ihlen, 2013). Since this thesis revolves around social media, I will also use the terms social media-users, Facebook users, or users, when referring to NetCom and Altibox’s publics, and potential publics, in social media or on Facebook. Also, Facebook followers, or followers, are applied when mentioning Facebook users that are specifically connected to NetCom and Altibox through social media, by following the companies’ Facebook pages. In addition, the words company and companies are used when relating specifically to NetCom and Altibox, and organization or organizations is applied when referring to organizations in general.

### ***1.3 Structure of the Thesis***

This thesis is divided into five chapters. In this chapter, chapter 1, the background and setting for the thesis, and the thesis’ research question have been explained. Chapter 2 identifies theory that will serve as a framework for the analysis. Here theoretical perspectives of dialogue, engagement and social media are explained and discussed. In the third chapter,

methods of research used to answer the research question, qualitative content analysis and qualitative interviews, are introduced and discussed. In addition, the research's quality is discussed based on the research and method's reliability, validity and generalizability. In chapter 4 an analysis based on my findings and on the theoretical perspectives of engagement, dialogue, and social media is presented. Finally, in chapter five a conclusion is given.

## 2 Theory

In this chapter I will present theoretical perspectives of dialogue, engagement and social media. These perspectives will operate as a framework for the analysis and discussion of my findings in chapter 4. This chapter can be divided into two main sections: engagement and dialogue, and social media. In the section involving engagement and dialogue I will first identify and discuss perspectives of engagement in public relations literature and research, and then present dialogue theory as a concept of public relations. Furthermore, I will give a presentation of engagement situated in dialogic theory, and finally criticism towards dialogue theory will be accounted for. In the second section that concerns social media, an identification of central concepts of social media, and moreover social networking sites and Facebook will be made. In the end of this chapter, engagement situated in social media, prerequisites of online engagement and dialogue and challenges posed for organizations in social media will be discussed and rendered.

### ***2.1 Engagement and Dialogue***

Engagement has emerged as an important concept, based on new technology such as social media, in public relations. And although academics and professionals all seem to agree that engagement is “good” and refers to its importance, information about why we should engage, what engagement actually is, or how to do it, is ambiguous or does not exist at all. This way, Taylor and Kent explain that engagement can be described as an ideograph, being “concrete, vague and evanescent all at the same time” (2014: 385). To this day engagement is described as commitment, something that makes us interested or holds our attention, and as interaction (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Taylor and Kent have introduced and argue for a dialogic approach to engagement, where they focus on a “how to” approach, and where engagement is seen as an essential feature of dialogue (2014). They identify the concept of dialogic engagement as:

Engagement is part of dialogue and through engagement, organizations and publics can make decisions that create social capital. Engagement is both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 384).

Taylor and Kent identify engagement and dialogue as interdependent (2014). In this, organizations need to establish engagement with publics to create dialogue, and enter dialogue to create engagement. Based on Taylor and Kent's approach to engagement, this section will explain and discuss engagement and dialogue theory.

### **2.1.1 Towards a Definition of Engagement**

Taylor and Kent explain that engagement serves as “two-way, relational, give-and-take” (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 391) between organizations and publics, in which a relationship already exists. Based on engagement, organizations and publics are able to interact, nurture knowledge and their relationship, and furthermore gain a common understanding of reality (Taylor & Kent, 2014). As a first step towards gaining an understanding of engagement as a concept, engagement can be identified to be dependent on an existing relationship between the organization and its publics, and it is through engagement that they are able to build stronger and mutual relationships, equally prominent for all parties to be in. Linjuan Rita Men and Wan-Hsiu Sunny Tsai (2014) also point to engagement's potential for relationship development. They describe engagement as a behavioral motivator that involves dimensions such as participation and dedication, where the goal is to create meaningful relationships. They argue that to create relationships, motivation is an important factor, as it is a key essence in creating supportive behaviors as trust, satisfaction and empathy (Men & Tsai, 2014). By this, organizations should create engagement because it helps build and strengthen mutual and meaningful relationships with publics. While this gives insight into *why* one should create engagement, *what* engagement is still seems unclear, and needs further examining.

Similarly to Men and Tsai, Minjeong Kang also refers to engagement as motivation, or more precisely as a “psychologically motivated affective state” (2014: 402). He argues that engagement has derived as a concept in new public relations practice, based on new technology, to connect the concept of public relations' relationship dimensions and estimates of supportive behavior (Kang, 2014). Kang conceptualizes engagement as an affective motivator, and where engagement is based on characteristics as affective commitment, positive affectivity and empowerment (Kang, 2014: 402). Affective commitment is a concept of organizational theory; it is based on factors as emotional attachment, identification and involvement, and refers to one's desire to follow a course of action, dedication and loyalty (Kang, 2014; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

The second characteristic, positive affectivity is a personality trait and “the tendency towards feeling happy about situations and outcomes and to express positive responses to adverse situations” (Customer Service Psychology, 2011). Macey and Schneider argue that positive affectivity; “feelings of persistence, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption, enthusiasm, alertness and pride” (2008: 12) is closely linked to engagement (Kang, 2014). When feeling positive people tend to seek social interaction, and expressing positivity tends to make people want to interact (Customer Service Psychology, 2011). Finally, empowerment is an element of civic engagement and is similar to sharing power (Gordon, Baldwin-Philippi & Balestra, 2013). At community level empowerment is “in which individuals cooperate to improve their collective lives and the relationship between the community organizations that sustain their quality life” (Gordon, et al., 2013: 10). Based on Kang (2014) we can now identify *what* engagement is: behaviors of motivation, and further, based on Men and Tsai (2014), and Taylor and Kent (2014), this is what motivate publics’ interaction, participation, dedication and commitment.

In addition, Kang identifies trust and satisfaction as antecedents of engagement. In 1999, Hon and Grunig published a study concerning guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations. In the study Hon and Grunig introduced trust and satisfaction as two dimensions of organization-public relationships (1999). They identified trust as the parties’ willingness and faith to expose oneself to the other party. According to Hon and Grunig, there are three aspects of trust: integrity, dependability and competence. Integrity accounts for the belief that the organization is fair and just. Dependability reflects the organizations’ capacity to follow through on promises, while competence says something about the organization’s ability to perform a certain standard. Further, satisfaction is characterized as to what degree each party is feeling positively towards the other (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Kang argue that trust and satisfaction are important relationship variables for publics to be engaged (2014).

As mentioned, Men and Tsai also identified trust and satisfaction as important relationship variables, although they included the aspect of empathy as a third component (2014). Likewise, Taylor and Kent identify dialogue to be a product based on trust, empathy, also referred to as sympathy, and satisfaction (2014). In their conceptualization of dialogue, and as will be discussed further in the next section in this chapter, they identify the aspect of empathy as the support and confirmation of public goals and interests (Kent and Taylor,



2002). Therefore, trust, satisfaction and empathy are important variables of engagement, as engagement is a feature of dialogue, and is based on an existing relationship between the organization and stakeholder. Hence, organizations need to establish trustworthy, satisfying and empathetic relationships with publics to create engagement.

So far, I have identified *what* engagement is, and *why* it is important for organizations to create it. Before I go any further, let me recap: engagement is a behavioral motivator, based on affective commitment, positive affectivity and empowerment that drive publics to interact, participate, be dedicated and committed. These behaviors of motivation are based on an existing relationship, where trust, satisfaction and empathy are important variables, and through engagement, organizations can, in the long run, build and strengthen mutual and meaningful relationships with publics. Finally, *how* engagement is created needs further examining, and is this thesis' main focus. As mentioned, Taylor and Kent propose that engagement is created through dialogue, and dialogue depends on engagement (2014). Therefore, in the two next sections, theory of dialogue, and engagement as a feature of dialogue, will be presented.

### **2.1.2 Dialogue in Public Relations**

Symmetry, in which two-way symmetrical communication is the most commonly known model, and excellence theory, has been the leading body of work and dominant theory in public relations for many years (Botan & Hazleton, 2009; Taylor & Kent, 2014; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). The theory was founded by James E. Grunig and was the first to explain ethical public relations practices (as cited in Taylor & Kent, 2014). Today, Grunig's symmetry and excellence theory is no longer considered as the one grand theory in public relations. "Over time several other theories emerged as alternatives for explaining the complexity of communication and relationships" (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 384). Organization-public relationships and dialogue are other and more recent approaches to public relations and are today seen as central paradigms (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Ledingham, 2009; Taylor & Kent, 2014; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012).

As public relations have shifted towards a relational approach, dialogue has become an important concept (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). Dialogue is often described as the ethical approach to public relations (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014; Theunissen & Wan

Noordin, 2012). Kent and Taylor define dialogue as “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (1998: 325), where the participants’ willingness to reach a mutual beneficial position is central. Moreover, they explain that it is a form relational interaction, where it is based on an existing relationship, where trust, satisfaction and empathy are important variables. Engaging in dialogue implies that participants must listen, treat each other as people and not as assets, and be open for change. Here, the goal is to achieve an understanding and to be open to new possibilities, while individual and organizational goals are prioritized thereafter (Taylor & Kent, 2014). The dialogic approach to public relations focus on cultivating and maintaining relationships with individuals rather than groups, based on understanding and tolerance towards the individuals, and honesty and mutual beneficiaries for both parties in the relationship (Taylor & Kent, 2009). Kent and Taylor emphasize that dialogue in public relations should be used to build interpersonal relationships, where participants at a personal level participate in dialogue (2002). Through a dialogic approach to public relations organizations can engage publics to create meaningful relationships (Kang, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Kent and Taylor explain that dialogue in public relations communication is characterized by five general principles: mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment (2002: 24 - 30). Mutuality, characterizes the detection of relationships between the organization and the public. This principle considers the organization and publics as inseparable through their relationship and therefore the two parties depend on finding a way to cooperate. Because of this, organizations must seek to adopt a wide and open perspective for and in their communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Mutuality is a feature of dialogue based on cooperation and “mutual equality” (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Through dialogue organizations and publics must acknowledge and accept each other as diverse individuals, as dialogue is based on intersubjectivity. The dialogic participants must seek to understand each other, and acknowledge and treat each other as equals. Manipulation is not dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

The second principle of dialogue, propinquity, refers to the rhetorical exchange in the dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Here, the organization and publics must participate in matters that affect both party, where publics must be informed about issues and state issues that concern them. “Dialogic propinquity means that publics are consulted in matters that influence them, and for publics, it means that they are willing and able to articulate their

demands to organizations” (Kent & Taylor, 2002: 26). Kent and Taylor refer to three components that establish propinquity. First, the communication must be present; parties must be involved in communication when the issue occurs (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Online communication environments, for example, allow for real-time interaction (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Through a combination of online communication environments and new technology, typically hand-held devices as smartphones and pads, people can also communicate with organizations and access information at anytime and anywhere. Second, propinquity also depends on the communication to happen in a place that is shared between the parties (Kent & Taylor, 2002), e.g. Facebook pages are shared spaces between organizations and their followers. Finally, the last component of propinquity is what Kent and Taylor initially considered as engagement in dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Here, they recognize dialogic engagement as when the parties are accessible and committed, at a high level, to the communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Since dialogue implies that publics are included in matters, and able and willing to state their concerns, organizations must also be available and open for input by publics. Kent and Taylor explain how empathy, also called sympathy, concerns that organizations should facilitate and encourage publics’ participation, and listen to them (2002). For example, social media platforms facilitate participation, as they are built for social interaction (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Responsiveness is a feature of almost all social media, where anyone can join the conversation, and where social media users and organizations can equally respond to messages, and interact regarding matters that concern them (Kent, 2010). It is by encouraging publics to participate, facilitating their participation and listening to them, an organization is able to build empathetic relationships with publics. Publics can easily feel ignored if they are not heard and trust might be lost, therefore it is important for organizations to value stakeholders and listen to everyone, even those who do not agree with the organization (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

However, being available and open for everyone involves a degree of risk, as it involves being available and open for negative and critical inquiries. Kent and Taylor explain identify that all interpersonal and organizational relationships involve a degree of risk (2002). Risk in dialogue describes the will to interact with individuals or publics, although there is a risk of exposure, and consequences of the dialogue are unclear. To build relationships, dialogic participants have to give of themselves in a situation where one becomes vulnerable to

manipulation and mockery from other participants (2002: 28). Furthermore, dialogue is characterized by unpredictable and spontaneous exchanges, as dialogue is not based on pre-composed communication, and by one's conversational partners' different opinions and personalities (Kent & Taylor, 2002: 28). Characteristics as vulnerability, unpredictability and participants' differences, impose a risk for organizations, and in a public relations point of view, might be hard to accept, as public relations often concerns contracting any imposed environmental risk to achieve goals. However, Kent and Taylor argue that it is through dialogic risk organizations can develop stronger relationships with their publics (2002).

Mutuality, propinquity, empathy and risk, the previous dialogic features mentioned, establish the basis for the final principal: commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Dialogue is genuine, where the organization and publics should act and communicate based on what is best for the relationship, rather than the self. Commitment refers to the commitment to conversation and interpretation (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Dialogic participants must be committed to a mutual conversation, based on collective benefits and understanding. As previously stated, dialogue is premised on intersubjectivity, therefore dialogic participants must also acknowledge their differences and seek to interpret and understand these differences, when in dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Here, one should seek and facilitate a common understanding of the other party's situation, which is the core of dialogue.

### **2.1.3 The “how to” Approach: Dialogic Engagement**

Taylor and Kent, as mentioned, argue for a dialogic approach to engagement: “we believe that the best way to explicate engagement as a foundational public relations concept is to position the discussion of engagement within dialogue theory” (2014: 387). They consider engagement as a feature where the goal is to enhance knowledge and understanding between the participants, make beneficial decisions for both parties, and to foster “a fully functioning society, where decisions are made based on informed participative interactions that involve stakeholders” (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 391). As mentioned, engagement in dialogue was first described as a principle of propinquity (Kent & Taylor, 2002), where dialogic engagement “assumes accessibility, presentness, and a willingness to interact” (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 387). In their discussion of engagement, they have arrived at five components they propose set the foundation and conceptualize dialogic engagement in public relations. However, they emphasize that these components are not set in stone, but rather a first step towards a

conceptualization or minimum requirements of engagement. Taylor and Kent urges public relations scholars to further measure, test or adapt the principles (2014).

First, Taylor and Kent propose that engagement requires examination of the situation before any form of communication can happen between publics and the organization (2014). An organization should seek to collect knowledge regarding who their publics are, and how to communicate with them to understand the issue, before interacting. Second, one must show positivity towards the public's actions and needs (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Here, the organization should demonstrate that their publics and their opinions are valued. For example, by being available for publics' interaction, facilitating and encouraging participation in their communication, an organization demonstrates positivity towards publics' input, experiences and needs. Third, organizations must communicate and interact with publics frequently to create relationships, and not only in a situation in need of communication (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Fourth, one must seek publics' advice regarding organizational, public or communal matters (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Organizations should seek to include publics in organizational and communal matters, matters that may have impact on and affect their publics. Seeking their advice concerning these matters may provide organizations with mutual beneficial relationships. Finally, engagement requires "interaction that contributes to a fully functioning society whereby organizations and stakeholders recognize their interdependence and act together for the good of the community" (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 391).

These five components are at an external level and describe how organizations should interact in meeting with publics. Taylor and Kent also argue that internal processes create engagement (2014). In 1989 Pearson introduced six dimensions of dialogic organizational systems (as cited in Taylor & Kent, 2014). These dimensions are initial guidelines for communication, which must be considered before any interaction can take place, and the main goal is to enhance organization-public relationships (Taylor & Kent, 2014). In their discussion of engagement Taylor and Kent present these dimensions, and discuss them in relation modern public relations and engagement (2014). Pearson's six dimensions show how entangled and interrelated organizations and publics are, as well as how important absolute engagement is between the two. The first dimension accounts for a mutual understanding of the communication structure between the parties, that is to say an understanding and agreement on when an interaction will begin, how to maintain it and when it will end. This dimension is based on a way of thinking where dialogue is based on planned interaction, and not something

“that just happens”. Many practitioners interact on social media through spontaneous communication, but those spontaneous interactions are not acknowledged as dialogue, according to Taylor and Kent (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

The second dimension deals with the mutual understanding and agreement between all parties, on the subject of how long it should take before interaction is initiated. In this, all parties must recognize the rules of communication, to which they are all committed. This aspect of time, which the rules of the second dimension is based upon, is especially applicable in today’s media landscape, where social media enables individuals to interact anywhere and at any time. As Taylor and Kent point out, avoiding uncomfortable discussions, feedback and questions in social media is seen as reluctance in engaging publics and further disables the concept of dialogue (2014). The third dimension furthermore suggests that to engage, organizations also need to approach topics that are difficult for the organization. “[A] dialogic orientation to communication is premised on the assumption that risk is a normal part of all interpersonal interactions and all dialogue” (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 393). Here, organizations should initiate conversational topics that also might have negative impact on the organization or their publics. Exclusively communicating topics that are positive for the organization is not dialogue.

The fourth dimension concerns the response, where criteria of answers are discussed. This dimension states that any question needs a proper answer, and that in a dialogue; answers are essential to interact and create trust. Without trust there is no dialogue. The fifth dimension presents the channel in which communication happens. As mentioned earlier, direct and human communication is often the ideal when it comes to engagement, and social media is believed to reproduce this form of communication. Taylor and Kent address how this view is problematic, because usually dialogue is not public, where as social media is public platforms where content is available for everyone to see. When organizations use social media, they don’t give any information concerning “how to contact organizational members or engage them, except via the very public medium of social media” (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 393). Finally, Pearson’s sixth dimension concerns rules regarding revising the rules of communication. As a relationship changes, the rules must also change or be reflected upon. This points towards a two-way interaction perspective that leads to engagement, risk and trust, and where all parties involved are able to change and revise the rules of communication. Although in reality it’s usually one-way, where the rules are controlled and chosen by the

organization without involving publics in the process, thus a manner in which engagement is absent (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

To update Pearson's six dimensions Taylor and Kent propose a seventh rule adapted to today's society (2014). Their seventh dimension is based on a perspective of publics, as Pearson's six dimensions only regard rules of communication from an organizational perspective. Taylor and Kent (2014) identify the seventh dimension as:

Steps should be taken by publics to ensure that their spokespeople and leaders be trained in dialogic engagement so that they are prepared for the risks, challenges and opportunities created by dialogue. These same steps should be taken by organizations that want to engage publics (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 394)

Rules of communication need to be based on what is right for society, instead of a mere focus on publics, stakeholders and shareholders. As initially presented, Taylor and Kent state that engagement is helpful to organizations and publics to make decisions that create social capital (2014). Social capital is the resources one has access to through one's relationships with other people. It is the result of planned or unplanned strategic interactions such as transfer of "gifts, services, words, time, attention, care, or concern" (Ihlen, 2007: 272). Two main components define social capital: the amount of relationships an individual or organization obtains, and the amount of capital individuals and organizations in these relationships possess, and that the individual or organization have access to through their relationships (Ihlen, 2007). In this context, engagement and social capital are the conduct and relationships of various communication receivers in a network of "organizations, stakeholders, and publics, as well as activists and stakeseekers" (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 395).

#### **2.1.4 Criticism of Dialogue Theory**

Theunissen and Wan Noordijn take a critical stance to the theoretical public relations approach to dialogue (2012). Here, they discuss how theory has moved from recognizing public relations as a communication process to a management process. Where public relations is about planning communication to achieve goals favorable for the organization. Public relations "(...) focuses on a desired outcome, and plans all communication activities accordingly" (Theunissen & Wan Noordijn, 2012: 7). As presented, dialogue is about

achieving a mutual understanding and consensus in communication. To achieve a mutual understanding, and further dialogue, dialogic participants must succumb to the communication, meeting other parties as equals, and give up some control over the result or outcome of communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Theunissen and Wan Noordin explain this as problematic in situating dialogue in public relations, as public relations is about achieving desirable goals, and moreover, one can assume that managers would not be probable to relinquish control over an outcome (2012).

In dialogue participants should listen, treat each other as people and not assets, and be open for change (Kent & Taylor, 2002). However, in public relations, seeing it as a management process, publics, stakeholders and organizations are materialized and objectified. For organizations to manage communication processes, they effectively categorize and look for similarities, and therefore objectify stakeholders and publics. To build relationships one collects information and knowledge of human behavior and uses this knowledge to persuade intentionally and to achieve public attention (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012: 9). Kent and Taylor propose that dialogue concerns relational interactions, where a relationship already exists, and where the goal is to create a mutual relationship (2002). Yet, through Theunissen and Wan Noordin's discussion, they explain how mutual or equal relationships are impossible, as there will always be one who has more knowledge, be more vulnerable or powerful, compared to the other (2012: 9). Believing that the relationship is mutual, publics or stakeholders can easily be misguided in their relationships with the organization.

However, Theunissen and Wan Noordin also state that dialogue and public relations also bear many similarities. Both dialogue and public relations involve including as many publics and stakeholders as possible in communication, treating each other as human beings, and a focus on listening and speaking. In addition, both practices focus on creating communities or environments, where participants' genuine participation is encouraged and facilitated. In dialogue and public relations, there should be a willingness to focus on the process of communication, rather than the outcome (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Theunissen and Wan Noordin propose that organizations' aim should be to enable communities that participants trust to interact in, e.g. environments that are prominent for dialogue (2012). In these environments, participants should acknowledge that they have a shared responsibility to participate. Theunissen and Wan Noordin argue that before dialogue can happen, monologue must often take place, as they are both important activities for public relations (2012).



Monologue is what creates awareness and “dialogue and awareness are both necessary for relationship-building” (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012: 10).

Furthermore, in their discussion, they point to the importance of knowing who one’s stakeholders or publics are. However, most often, the organization decide who their stakeholders or publics are, which is not ideal if the organization wants to create dialogue, as dialogue involves that anyone who feel affiliated to the organization should be given the opportunity to participate. “Stakeholders should be seen as active and aware participants, not simply ‘targeted audiences’ for the organization’s message or campaigns” (Theunissen & Wan Noordin: 11). Overall, Theunissen and Wan Noordin argue that dialogue is more philosophical and abstract in nature, than an operationalizable action (2012: 7). The core of organizational existence will always be to make profit, or else organizations cannot survive. They suggest that rather than focusing on dialogue as a step-to-step approach for public relations, dialogue should be recognized as an ideal to strive after, as it is not necessarily realistic to achieve, recognizing that organizations most often communicate through a desire of reaching goals.

## **2.2 Social Media**

The Internet and social media are said to have great potential for public relations (Coombs and Holladay, 2010; Kelleher, 2009; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor, et al., 2001). Researchers have even claimed that the Internet and public relations are “inextricably tied together” (Taylor, et al., 2001: 266). Through new technology, such as hand-held devices, etc., and social media, organizations can easily reach and interact with publics. Also, people can communicate and get valuable information about organizations anywhere and at anytime. "Because of technology, organizational spokespeople are no longer forced to rely on their relationships with media gatekeepers and the information subsidy to get word out about organizational activities to stakeholders and Publics" (Kent, 2013: 337). Social media and new technology has not only changed how people regard and keep information, but also how the public relations discipline works (Kent, 2013).

Through the recognition of social media and the Internet as a beneficial place to be, extensive research in relation to how to approach, adapt and communicate in meeting with publics has been conducted. As public relations practitioners are entering the user-generated social media

to communicate and interact with publics, interpersonal communication and mass communication are intertwining, creating a shift in the public relations practice (Ihlen, 2013). As was initially mentioned, in the public relations field, practitioners and scholars highlights opportunities for relationship building in the new media landscape, and where dialogue is considered the prominent approach (Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Kent, 2010, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Taylor, et al., 2001). In this section, I will first discuss and define general concepts of social media. Then I will give an account of engagement in social media, prerequisites of how to create it, and challenges posed by social media for organizations.

### **2.2.1 What is Social Media?**

Social media is term often used to describe platforms on the Internet that open up for social interaction, and makes it possible for users to create and share content such as text, pictures, video or links to other websites. Michael Kent defines social media as “any interactive communication channel that allows for two-way interaction and feedback” (2010: 645). Or as Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein put it: “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (2012: 101). According to Kaplan and Haenlein, a prerequisite to understand social media is to understand Web 2.0 and user generated content. The term Web 2.0 appeared first in 2004, and was used to describe the transition from a World Wide Web that acquired special competence to create content, and the creation of content was therefore limited to people with this competence, to a Web where anyone could create, maintain and collaborate content. Web 2.0, and its features, has enabled new media platforms where users are creators of content, and where anyone can be the sender, or receiver of a message (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Hence, social media is based on interactive communication, where users generate the content.

Although social media is a generic term, social media contain several distinct features. Today, a variety of social media offers different services, and are adapted to different groups of people. To clarify the variety Kaplan and Haenlein have categorized social media into six different subgroups:

1. Blogs/Micro blogs (e.g. Twitter)
2. Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)

3. Virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life)
4. Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)
5. Content communities (e.g. YouTube)
6. Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)

These subgroups are categorized based on their degree of two categories: self-disclosure and self-presentation, and media richness and social presence. Social presence is based on social presence theory which “states that media differ in the degree of “social presence” – defined as the acoustic, visual and physical contact that can be achieved – they allow to emerge between two communication partners” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). Mediums that are synchronous and interpersonal are high on social presence, e.g. live chat and face-to-face conversation. If a medium is high on social presence it is assumed that the conversational partners have more control over each other’s behavior. Media richness is similar to social presence and Kaplan and Haenlein states that the “goal of any communication is the resolution of ambiguity and the reduction of uncertainty” (2010: 61). With this, media richness is based on the amount of information a medium possesses and transmits during an amount of time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social-presentation argues that people’s desire in any communication or social interaction is to control what the other person is thinking of them. The presentation is done through self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is “the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information [...], that is consistent with the image one would like to give” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 62). All in all, applied to the context of social media, a medium can be categorized based on the medium’s degree of richness and in which degree it allows social presence, in what degree the medium requires self-disclosure and in what degree it allows self-presentation.

### **2.2.2 Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites is a sub-genre of social media (Aalen, 2015). Central to social networking sites are connections between people. boyd and Ellison, who are known for their research on social networking sites, presented a definition of the term in 2007, updated in 2013. Accordingly, a social network site has to meet three criteria: 1. Users have their own profile that consists of content created by the user, of other users or the system. 2. Users can articulate a list of their connections, e.g. friends, followers, etc., within the site. This list is visible for other users, and one can “view and traverse their lists of connections and those

made by others” (boyd & Ellison, 2007: 211) within the site. 3. Users can consume, produce and interact with newsfeeds of user-generated content from their connections within the site (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison & Boyd, 2013).

According to boyd and Ellison, what differentiate social networking sites from other sites are public profiles with a visible list of “friends” the users are connected to. “The Friends list contains links to each Friends’ profile, enabling viewers to traverse the network graph by clicking through the Friends list” (boyd & Ellison, 2007: 213). It is also common to be able to leave visible messages, also called “comments”, on each other’s profiles as well as features that allow you to send private messages (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Through social networking sites, which are structured as personal networks, a change in online communities has happened. Communities have gone from being defined by interests or topics to be individual oriented (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social networks are above all diverse and friends, personal pictures and videos, games, editorial news, commercials and information campaigns are all gathered in one place. Through social media, interpersonal relationships and preferences are a part of the digital media universe and the users can develop own communities, share opinions and feelings on their own premises (Haugseth, 2013). Aalen differentiates between synchronous and asynchronous relationships in social networking sites (2015). Synchronous relationships concern that the connection must be mutual. Here a user must request to become a part of another user’s network, where the other user must accept the request. Most commonly this is referred to as becoming “friends” in social networking sites. Asynchronous relationships refer to connections, where the user is not dependent on the other’s acceptance. In this, a user can be connected to a Facebook page, or another’s Twitter-profile, without the connection being mutual (Aalen, 2015).

Facebook is one of the social media platforms often referred to as “*the* social network”. The network is first of all an online platform that enables you to build relationship, socialize with friends, family, coworkers and acquaintances (Gershon, 2013). As mentioned earlier, Facebook is characterized as a social networking site. boyd and Ellison explain how Facebook, unlike other social networking sites, originated from being a closed college network (2007). It was launched in 2004, only available to Harvard students; to be a member and get access one had to have a Harvard e-mail address. After a while, it expanded and included other schools, but was still a closed and private community, where one had to have an e-mail address connected to a college to use the site. From 2005, the site quickly expanded

and soon included everyone, and today anyone with Internet-connection can join the site (boyd and Ellison, 2007).

According to Facebook, their mission is to “give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them” (Facebook, n.d.). One of the main features on Facebook is the user’s profile. The profile contains a profile picture of the user and information, such as biography, education, work, status, etc. Furthermore, the profile provides a “wall” that “(...) acts as a public bulletin board where any of the users’ listed friends can write short public messages” (Gershon, 2013: 379). This wall can be seen by anyone with access to the user’s profile. The sharing of photos is another popular feature enabled on Facebook. Users can post photos and videos and tag their friends. Tagging friends will automatically link the photo or video to that friend’s user profile. Facebook also offers features such as “(...) status updates, news feed, opinions and commentary postings, chat (instant messaging), likes and dislikes external links” (Gershon, 2013: 379).

Facebook’s “news-feed” functions as Facebook users’ homepage. In the news-feed posts, photos, videos, links, likes from the user’s social circles are highlighted. “It updates a personalized list of news stories through out the day” (Facebook, 2006) and once Facebook users logs onto Facebook, they get information generated by the activity of the users’ friends and social groups (Facebook, 2006). Moreover, Facebook does not only enable tools and features for private users, but offers features for organizations, companies and brands, as well. The platform distinguishes between its users by offering private user profiles, and organizations, companies and brands can choose between groups or pages (Aalen, 2015). Pages are designed for organizational use where whoever administrating the page can easily send out information to everyone connected to the page. Facebook pages are based on asynchronous connections, where to connect to the page one can choose to “follow” or “like” it, which is possible without the administrator’s approval (Aalen, 2015). Following a page means getting updates from the page, but one can like a page without following it. Furthermore, Facebook users that “follow” a page are defined as the Facebook page’s “followers”. Private users are through pages able to interact with organizations, and this interaction can either happen on the organization’s page wall, visible to everyone or through private and closed messaging (Aalen, 2015).

However, Facebook has also created some challenges for organizational Facebook presence, in relation to reachability and visibility. Facebook uses an algorithm that determines what content to show in a user's newsfeed when the user logs in (Aalen, 2015: 149). The algorithm shows more content from users that a user interacts a great deal with, than little. In addition, a posts reachability and visibility is determined by how popular content is (how many "likes", "shares", comments, etc.), and how recently the content was shared. Also, if the post contains a picture, is a factor that gives the post a higher degree of reach and visibility in a user's newsfeed Facebook (Aalen, 2015).

### **2.2.3 Situating Engagement in Social Media**

Engagement is also a frequently used term in public relations theory and research, in the context of social media (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2013, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). As initially discussed, engagement is a behavioral motivator, and is what drives people to interact, participate, be dedicated and committed. Zhang, Jiang and Carroll, similarly, defined social engagement, in the context of social media, as a community dynamic based on behavioral manifestation, where "social engagement is the commitment of a member to stay in the group and interact with other members" (2011: 570). Through their perspective, a key element of social engagement is activity or interaction, as in participation in collective activities. Furthermore, social engagement has to be voluntary, because engagement cannot be forced (Zhang et al., 2011). By situating engagement in social media, in a public relations perspective, engagement is therefore publics' motivation to commit to a group belonging to the organization, and what drives publics to interact, either with other people in the group, or with the organization. In this way, we can presume that the reason engagement is so often mentioned in context of social media or the Internet, in a public relations perspective, is because engagement is what motivates people to interact, and interaction is often defined as the core of social media. Interactivity is said to be one of the Internet and social media platform's core features, where organizations and publics are able to initiate contact and respond to each other (Kent, 2010).

In addition, Kent and Taylor claim that the Internet is the most prominent media platform for dialogue (Kent, 2010, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Taylor, et al., 2001). In this, they also emphasize the Internet's dynamic and interactive features' possibilities for dialogue, such

as “(...) text, sound image, movement, and the potential for real-time interaction all in one package” (Kent & Taylor, 2002: 31). This is also applicable to social media. Kent explains how social networks allow for “real-time interaction” and “short response times” (2010), making online conversations similar to human communication, an ideal in dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Moreover, social media provides “the ability to time-shift” (Kent, 2010), where social media users are able to interact, respond and communicate whenever they see fit. In this context, organizations rely on engagement to motivate publics to participate and meet the organizations in dialogue, through social media’s interactive and dialogical features, to create a foundation for building and maintaining relationships.

Especially, in relation to interactivity, engagement and dialogue, Kent and Taylor refers to how online platforms allow “dialogic loops” (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor, et al., 2001). Dialogic loops are feedback loops that enable organizations to create dialogue with publics, and where publics can comment and give feedback on the organization’s communication. Feedback loops are also similar to what Kent defines as “threaded dialogue” in social networking sites (2010). He explains how responsiveness is usually a feature of social networking sites that is most common through “threaded dialogue” (Kent, 2010: 648). A threaded dialogue is communication that occurs as feedback to a social media post: “threaded dialogue is conversation that emerges in response to news or conversational posts (or ‘threads’)” (Kent, 2010: 648). Facebook, for example, allow anyone to publicly comment and give feedback to posts. Further, the comments on a post appear in chronological order and in real time, and they are also available for anyone to see over time. Through these features, the communication between the parties can be perceived as a genuine dialogue (Kent, 2010).

However, interactive social media may be, a prerequisite for dialogue and engagement is communication at some level. An emerging tendency of social media sites is that they facilitate features that allow people to interact, without putting too much effort into it. This is the concept commonly known as “liking”, where for example on Facebook, people can press a thumbs-up button to show that they liked the post, recreating a form of interaction. “On most social networking sites, symbolic participation, or faux interaction, takes the place of genuine interaction” (Kent, 2010: 646). As a result, few people actually interact or participate on a site that they belong to. Taylor and Kent also point to this in relation to engagement, and explain that people are often misguided, and believe the usage of features such as tweeting, posting, liking or commenting is a form of engagement (Kang, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Kent also states that social media only have the potential to function dialogically, with emphasis on potential (2010). In this he refers to how social media also consists of the feature propinquity, as in propinquity in dialogue, which refers to the intimacy or closeness in social networks. Kent explain that social networking sites “have the *potential* to function dialogically, as relationships building tools” based on the “shared sense of connection engendered by social media” (2010: 648). This aspect is dependent on factors as devotion of time and real interaction to nurture a relationship, based on shared experience and understanding (Kent, 2010: 648). A key aspect of propinquity is how the strongest relationships are created through dialogue, and genuine and physical contact (Kent, 2010). In this, social networking sites only create an illusion and have the potential to create a sense of propinquity and dialogue, because physical contact is preferred (Kent, 2010). Yet, he also claims social media as a beneficial place to create dialogue as “social media evolve around what is essentially a central tenet of dialogue: the value of the individual” (Kent, 2010: 649).

As initially mentioned, even though social media is said to entail potential for dialogue and relationship building, research suggests that organizations are not fully tapping this potential. Kent critically argues, that in the current field of public relations, communication professionals often use social media as a tool for organizational marketing initiatives, advertising, exploiting stakeholders, and promotion (2013). Kent explains that instead organizations should focus on being genuinely social and to create meaningful relationships through interactivity, engagement and dialogue (2013). In this, he suggests that social media should be used to turn the conversation, to serve the interests of publics, by talking about what they want to talk about (Kent, 2013: 342). Here he refers to democracy as a perfect model of decision making for public relations in social media. He argues that public relations professionals through social media, should open up for genuine participation by pushing “for more inclusiveness, more transparency, more stakeholder input, more public input, more lectures, and more physical and virtual spaces where people can come and talk about ideas and issues” (Kent, 2013: 343). Moreover, where public relations professionals should encourage and invite competing voices and outsiders into the conversation to solve problems (Kent, 2013).

Essential for dialogue and engagement to take place is how the organizations exploits social media’s potential for dialogue and engagement. Even though social media facilitates dialogue



and engagement, one cannot assume dialogue or engagement to happen by simply offering information, or merely being present. The main aspect here is how the organization needs to facilitate and commit to dialogue and engagement in social media, and create mutual beneficiaries for both parties' presentness and interactions.

#### **2.2.4 Antecedents of Online Engagement**

Kent and Taylor recommends using the dialogic principles mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment, as mentioned and discussed previously, as a framework for online relationship building and communication (2002). In addition, they argue that a prerequisite of creating dialogue online is the organization's use of features provided by the Internet, e.g. how they exploit Internet's possibilities for dialogue (1998). On this basis they present five dialogic principles to create dialogue online: "ease of interface", "usefulness of information", "generation of return visits", "conservations of visitors" and "dialogic loop" (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor, et al., 2001). As dialogue and engagement are interdependent, these can also function as principles of engagement. The dialogic loop was presented above, and Kent and Taylor argue that a dialogic loop must exist for dialogue to happen, where dialogue is first accomplished when the organization facilitates and participates in the dialogic loop (1998). Here they highlight that organizations must train members in dialogic communication and that the organization must be available to answer inquiries, through feedback loops (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Furthermore, through the principle "ease of interface", Kent and Taylor argue that an online site should be user friendly and intuitive for publics to use, to create dialogue. It should be easy to navigate through the site and find the information one is looking for. This information should also be available, useful and of value for publics. In relation "the usefulness of information", Kent and Taylor discuss that it is important to create informed publics, and that informed publics are important when engaging in dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Here the responses should also contain useful information. Taylor et al. explain how valuable and useful information is important to attract publics to participate: "dialogue first involves attraction whereby individuals or groups desire to interact" (2001: 268). Waters et al. also refers to the importance of the usefulness of information distributed on Facebook. They propose posting news regarding the organization and its activities, and using audiovisual content as pictures, videos or audio files to attract publics to participate (Waters et al., 2009).

Finally, “conservation of visitors” and “generation of return visits” refers to providing publics with a site they want to stay on and a site they want to visit again (Taylor & Kent, 1998; Taylor et al., 2001). The information on the site should contain useful, valuable and updated information, and offer features that make the site attractive. Kent and Taylor explain that one of the main reasons publics should want to return to a site is the opportunity of dialogue with the organization. Moreover, they explain that links to other sites and commercials are not necessarily something that makes publics want to stay on the site. “Web visitors are to be valued; they are coming to your site for what the site offers and not to ‘shop for other sites’” (Kent & Taylor, 1998: 330). Public relations goal in online communication environments is to build and maintain relationships, therefore sending them away or trying to only entertain them would not fit its purpose (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Men and Tsai, on the other hand, argue that an important antecedent of creating engagement through social networking sites is a user’s interactions with the organization’s representatives. For example, through frequent and continuous interactions with an organization’s representative, a user might feel personally connected to this person. In this, they discuss that because social networking sites are communal and social, organizations’ representatives often act as users’ friends to integrate themselves into users’ social networks (Men & Tsai, 2013). In addition, social networking sites also provides possibilities for this, since users can observe and get familiar with and how organizations’ representatives communicate with other users and the representatives’ personality, which may enable engagement (Men & Tsai, 2013). Furthermore, Tsai and Men also propose perceived credibility as an antecedent engagement and a possibility provided by social networking sites (2013). Here, they refer to the credibility of information that the organization and users within an organizations’ network provides to the network. Organizations are more likely to be perceived credible on social networking sites as users can interact by giving their opinions, identifying errors and correct the organization, publicly for anyone to see. This, in turn, engenders users to perceive organizational social networking pages as credible, and the organization as trustworthy (Tsai & Men, 2013).

In addition, when other users share information about the organization the information is more likely to be perceived as credible. This is also probably the reason why customers or publics have started to turn to organizations’ Facebook pages, Twitter-accounts, etc., instead of their official websites, because within the organization’s social network, organizations can

address users' questions and concerns in an open direct manner (Tsai & Men, 2013: 79). Moreover, through social networking sites users do not only interact with the organization, but also other users within the organizations' network, which may create engagement in relation to community identification (Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013). Here, users can interact with other members of an organization's network, which share the same preferences in organizations, and identify with these members. As a result, the users interact and create group dynamics that may further deepen the users' commitment or dedication towards the organization (

). On this basis, organizational social networking sites' pages "is engaging not only because it provides useful or entertaining information, but also because it may serve as a communal environment where consumers can share resources and provide support to one another" (Tsai & Men, 2013: 79).

### **2.2.5 Social Media: New Challenges**

Even though social media is said to create opportunities for organizations, it also created new challenges for organizations to consider when entering the sphere. Organizations have drawn to the Internet as a platform for public relations, because this has evolved to be a potentially important source for publics to collect information from. Moreover, through the user-generated social media, publics are granted with the possibility to create, spread, share and collect information in a much larger extent than in any other media platforms. The Internet is said to have the potential to "level the playing field" between organizations and publics, to suffice as a "potential equalizer", and "democratize" discussion of issues (Kelleher, 2009: 173). Through the Internet and social media, publics are granted with increased control. Coombs and Holladay explain that on the Internet, power is shared between participants, where most often publics guide, choose topics, and are in control of the conversations with organizations (2010).

For example, when an organization decides to use the user-generated social media as a channel for communication, the organization has no control over what content users post on their Facebook page, Twitter-account, etc. Thus, users can post equally as much negative feedback about the organizations, as positive. Aalen explains that there exist countless examples where organizations have been overwhelmed with negative or unwanted inquiries in social media (2015). In addition, negative feedback and inquiries can also quickly escalate

because others can participate in this communication, and further the negative information can go “viral”; be spread throughout social media, and in worst case to other media platforms. This has especially created new challenges for organizations, as they are used to be in position of authority through the more traditional media, and therefore in more control (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

In addition, people have become harder to reach and are more disintegrated. Publics or stakeholders are no longer regarded to have one shared public knowledge, but instead people have started to individually select what information they want to relate and listen to (Kent, 2013). Kent explains how also people and networks one is connected to in social media are interchangeable (2010). Friends or networks can easily be replaced with other friends or networks, and potentially fill the same need for the user. Therefore, an individual’s social media connections are often arbitrary, and participation in a network is an interchangeable activity (Kent, 2010). This is likely to pose challenges for organizations that want to build and maintain relationships with publics, and additional requirements needs to be met to keep publics connected to the organizations. Furthermore, social media are most often entirely open, where anyone with an Internet-connection, or, in some cases an account is required, can post messages, comment and participate in conversations. This provides organizations with the opportunity to be perceived as open and available for publics’ participation and inquiries. However, it also creates another challenge for organizations’ social media presence, when people post negative and critical messages towards the organization, these inquiries are open and available for anyone to see (Kent, 2010).

On the other hand, social networking sites as Facebook, provides the feature of moderation (Kent, 2010). Kent describes this feature as antisocial, as it involves editorial supervision, where moderators can edit or delete messages, and define their profile’s degree of privacy (2010). For example, through corporate Facebook pages, the page owner or owners, i.e. representatives from an organization, are the moderators of the page, and can delete or hide content they do not want visible. As a result, social media does not only offer opportunities for organizations, but also challenges that they need to endure and conduct, in order to be able to tap social media’s potential for relationship building. This is also why it is important for organizations to create engagement in social media, because engagement is what motivates publics to commit to organizations’ networks that are easily interchangeable for publics. Moreover, by creating engagement, publics are more likely motivated to listen, participate and

interact towards the organizations' communication, in an environment characterized by an abundance of information, where publics individually select what information they want to relate and listen to, and where publics are often in control of the conversations.

### **2.3 Summary**

The aim of this chapter has been to identify theoretical perspectives of phenomena related to the research question: engagement and social media. These perspectives operate as this study's framework, and will be the basis of the analysis presented in chapter 4. First of all, as presented, engagement is a feature of dialogue, and is what motivates publics to interact, participate, be dedicated and committed. Therefore, means that create dialogue are also means that establish engagement, and vice versa. It is through the continuous creation of engagement and dialogue, that organizations eventually are capable of building and maintaining beneficial and meaningful relationships with publics (Johnston, 2014; Kang, 2014; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Men & Tsai, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). In this context, theory of dialogue and engagement has been presented, and will equally be used to outline, investigate and interpret how NetCom and Altibox create engagement. Criticism of dialogue theory has also been included, and can help create a more diversified picture of the companies' communication. Social media was also defined as a favorable place to create engagement, because of the platforms' potential for dialogue and interactivity (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ihlen, 2013; Kent, 2010, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Waters, et al., 2009). Yet, the media sphere also poses new challenges for organizations to be aware of when deciding to enter social media (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Kent, 2010, 2013). The identified technical characteristics of social media and Facebook will help clarify possibilities and limitations of NetCom and Altibox's communication, and their acquired strategies to adapt to the platform to create engagement. Before I present the analysis and findings of my research, I will present and discuss the methodological procedure.

### 3 Methods

A method is a tool and a way of solving problems and discovering new knowledge. A method cannot give answers to the questions we ask, but sets the foundation for systematic and planned examination of the “what”, “why”, “who” and “how” that we impose on society (Holme & Solvang, 1996). In this chapter I will present and discuss the methods that I have chosen to answer and investigate my research question. In addition, this chapter will elaborate the weaknesses and strengths of the study, through a discussion of the research’s reliability, validity, generalizability and ethics.

#### 3.1 *Qualitative Case Study*

This thesis is based on a qualitative case study with a holistic multiple-design. As Holme and Solvang explain, a qualitative method is applicable when the researcher has the desire of full comprehension, an overall perspective of a phenomenon, diverse interpretation, forming of hypotheses, theorizing, or an understanding of social processes (1996: 74). Compared to the quantitative method, which is applicable to conditions that can be measured and counted, the qualitative approach involves an in-depth investigation of a limited number of occurrences, rather than several (Østbye, Helland, Knapskog & Larsen, 2007). The goal of the qualitative method is to gain an increased understanding of the problems one is investigating (Holme & Solvang, 1996). Because I want to investigate *how* engagement is created, as defined in the research question, a qualitative approach is essential to understand and interpret the narratives of engagement created by organizations in social media. Therefore a qualitative method, which is both descriptive and analytical, is a prominent approach to gain accurate insight into the research question.

A case study is an intensive and detailed study of one individual “case” (Østbye et al., 2007). Yin (2014) explains that a case study, as method, is applicable to a study that investigates complex social phenomena and where the research question seeks to answer the “how” or “why” of present circumstances where the researcher has little or no control. “The case study is preferred when examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (Yin, 2014: 12). Therefore applicable techniques for the case study, among others, are direct observations of an event or activities are relevant to the study and interviews with people involved with and in these activities or events. Engagement, which is the main

focus of this thesis, is a social phenomenon, and, as mentioned, the research question refers to “how” the companies can create engagement. I perform direct observations of communication on NetCom and Altibox’s Facebook pages, and conducted interviews with representatives from the two organizations, i.e. people involved in and with the activities. Finally, selections of data, based on the two companies’ communication on their Facebook pages, represent contemporary activities.

Moreover, Yin differentiates between four different case designs, based on the quantity of cases and units of analysis: holistic- or embedded-case studies with single- or multiple-case designs (2014). A holistic multiple-case design implies investigating more than one case to answer the research question, where often comparisons are made between the cases. Yin explains that multiple case designs may often be preferred over single-case designs, as having two, or more, cases might broaden one’s perspective when investigating a phenomenon. This thesis is based on a case study with a holistic multiple-case design, where NetCom and Altibox constitute multiple cases. In addition, this thesis is characterized by a mixed methods design, where more than one methodological approach is conducted: the study’s main method is qualitative content analysis, supplemented by in-depth interviews. The mixed methods design is a technique within the case study. In a mixed method design a combination of multiple research techniques are embedded in one study where they all share the same research question. Yin argues that through this research technique researchers are allowed a greater insight into complicated research questions, and are able to gather more prosperous and dynamic evidence, compared to the use of one method (2014: 66).

### ***3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis***

The main method for this thesis is a qualitative content analysis. A qualitative content analysis is based on systematic examination of documents, where content and data, relevant for the research question, is categorized and registered (Grønmo, 2004: 187). The qualitative content analysis can be used on any form of documents, but most commonly for the qualitative content analysis is to analyze documents verbally available through oral or written text (Grønmo, 2004). In this thesis the documents of systematic examination are NetCom and Altibox’s Facebook pages, focusing on the companies’ communication to, or with, publics. Grønmo explains that the aim of the qualitative content analysis is to get detailed information regarding values, beliefs, attitudes, perspectives or arguments that are central in the text

(2004). Therefore, I have chosen the qualitative content analysis to further get an in-depth understanding of the documents, and find general tendencies, based on how NetCom and Altibox communicate to create engagement.

### **3.2.1 Selection of Data**

Østbye et al. explain that a strategic selection of data is based on selecting data that based on the theoretical and analytical goal of the thesis is the most interesting and most relevant (2007: 247). As initially mentioned, I have chosen to investigate how NetCom and Altibox create engagement on Facebook, based on the assumption that the two companies are prominent users of Facebook as a communication channel. This assumption is based on their acknowledgements for their use of social media, as I presented in the introduction chapter. I have chosen to strategically select the companies because, based on the theoretical perspective of engagement, I believe that an organization must communicate and interact with publics at a relatively high level to be able to create engagement. As Taylor and Kent argue engagement cannot be created without dialogue, and dialogue cannot exist without engagement (2014). Hence, we can assume that Altibox and NetCom contribute with a high level of communication and interaction, and therefore to some extent build dialogue and create engagement with publics on social media.

Based on limitations in time and scope I have chosen to focus on Facebook as a social media platform. The reason I have chosen Facebook is because of its high numbers of users (Kiss, 2014) and the percentage of companies that are present in social media, compared to for example Twitter (Høgberg, 2014). Furthermore, my selection of documents consists of NetCom and Altibox's communication, through Facebook posts and comments, on Altibox and Netcom's Facebook pages. The collection process has been unproblematic based on Facebook's public nature. Based on time, scope and resources I have chosen to collect the documents from one week. Østbye et al. explain that a fundamental step in the process of collecting data is always to define and refine a selection of the total universe one is investigating (2007). Therefore, I have chosen to collect data from week 16 in 2015 (Monday 13<sup>th</sup> of April to Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> of April). This has resulted in a total data of 1278 Facebook posts, where 459 of the posts were collected from NetCom's Facebook page, and the remaining 819 from Altibox's Facebook page. In addition, during week 16, NetCom posted ten status updates and Altibox four. These status updates are also included in the data, however related



comments or feedback through conversational posts to the status updates have not been counted, but have also been the subject of analysis. Overall, I believe that the collected quantity of data is substantial, and will help me gain an in-depth insight of NetCom and Altibox's communication.

### **3.2.2 Processing and Analysis of Data**

As Østbye et al. explains studying texts does not give knowledge of how the texts are received, nor affects individuals or society, but knowledge about the texts (2007). There is a distinction between the text's what or how, content or expression, between the material conveyed and how it is conveyed. Holme and Solvang (1996) explain that when analyzing text a "holistic analysis" or a "sub analysis" can be used. The holistic analysis involves looking at the totality of the collected documents, where the data is first given meaning when it is put in the context that they were first situated in (Holme & Solvang, 1996). Meanwhile the fundament for a sub analysis is that the documents are texts that contain expressions about a variety of phenomena and that these are linked to the phenomena in focus of the research question. These expressions or statements can then be categorized and counted, and further in the analysis, through each individual statement or expression, one builds an understanding of the phenomena one is investigating (Holme & Solvang, 1996). Furthermore Østbye et al. state that the goal of qualitative analysis is to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of conditions and where it is common to analyze data as they are collected (2007).

The data collection process and analysis has been conducted in parallel. Through the data analysis process, I first read through the Facebook posts and comments during week 16 to obtain a general picture of NetCom and Altibox's Facebook communication, and wrote down my thoughts and impression. Then, I collected the data by taking screenshots of Facebook posts and comments. After the data was collected, I read through the posts and comments, and categorized the data's main recurring tendencies of how the companies communicate. These categories were inserted into a table, and then I read through the posts and comments again, and revised the categories thereafter. Here, I conducted a careful reading of the screenshots I had collected, and wrote down thought and reflections. Holme and Solvang state that one cannot draw any specific conclusions from a sub analysis without relating the content to its context, i.e. a holistic analysis (1996: 135). The theoretical perspectives presented in the previous chapter: engagement, dialogue, and social media, thus operated further as a

framework for the categories, and the alternation between data and theory was continued throughout my analysis of the collected data. The combination of a holistic and sub analysis can give a qualitative understanding that also provides the basis for a more tangible documentation of my findings (Holme & Solvang, 1996: 135).

Finally, I counted the occurrence of tendencies in the data, based on the categories, and wrote them down in the table. In the end I had 15 categories, based on main tendencies of the companies' communication (see Appendix B for table showing communication tendencies). In this manner I got an overview of dominating characteristics of the companies' communication in the data material. Yet, this quantification is not on an attempt to conduct a quantitative method. It is rather based on an attempt of making a simple quantification to support the qualitative method, and to further be an aid in the analysis process. After I had categorized the Facebook posts and comments, and based on the analysis found characteristics and means in the companies' communication, I merged the categories in the table (see Appendix B for table showing strategies for engagement), and found four prominent strategies shared between NetCom and Altibox. However, it was not an entirely straightforward process to identify these four strategies, and I tried and failed several times before I reached the final strategies. The Facebook posts and comments consisted of complex content, where I had to interpret attitudes and interests that emerged through the companies' Facebook posts and comments, and also based on its context. Therefore it was difficult to manage all the post and comments. Yet, since I have made several attempts, and have had to work with the data material several times, to find representative categories and subcategories for the material, I believe that I have achieved to get an in depth understanding and thorough insight to the companies' communication, that I might not have achieved otherwise. Further challenges with the categorization will be presented in *3.4.1 Reliability*.

### **3.3 Qualitative Interviews**

In addition to the qualitative content analysis, I have conducted two qualitative interviews to clarify and gain insight to NetCom and Altibox's strategies of- and thoughts on their use of Facebook, how they communicate, and create engagement. These interviews will not be subjects of analysis, but are rather meant to help clarify findings of the content analysis, and contribute with additional information, to give a broader perspective and understanding of my research question. Østbye et al. (2007) explains that the qualitative interview can be referred

to as a conversational interview, where the aim is to increase the value of information and create the basis for a deeper and more complete understanding of the phenomena being investigated (Holme & Solvang, 1996). Holme and Solvang describe this process as “tapping” the everyday conversation for the information it can give about the issues that one is concerned with (1996: 94). The purpose of these interviews is to collect information or to be informed by the interview subject (Østbye et al., 2007).

### **3.3.1 Interview Subjects**

Holme and Solvang explain that selection of interview subjects in qualitative interviews does not happen randomly (1996). The selection of interview subjects occurs systematically on the basis of certain conscious strategic and theoretical defined choices (Holme & Solvang, 1996). Therefore, before I could conduct my interviews, I had to make a conscious selection based on whom I wanted to interview, and that would give me best insight to the phenomena I am investigating. Holme and Solvang explain that in qualitative interviews it is common to use interview subjects that are assumed to obtain a high level of information about the relations one is investigating to get increased information (1996). Because of this, I have chosen interview representatives from the companies responsible for, or in positions of authority, in regard to the companies’ social media use and communication. Therefore, I contacted NetCom and Altibox’s Communication Managers through e-mail, stating my purpose, who in reply referred me to the companies’ representatives responsible for social media: Engagement and Content Manager in Netcom, Morten Skjelbred, and Senior Digital Manager in Altibox, Kjell Arild Nielsen. My interview subjects were therefore chosen strategically, based both on my wish and intent to get increased information and knowledge of how the two companies’ communicate in social media, and the two companies’ Communication Managers’ recommendations. Based on Skjelbred and Nielsen’s positions of authority in regard to the companies’ social media use, they may provide my research with a high level of insight, information and thoughts in relation to my research question.

In addition to the interviews, I have collected the companies’ social media guidelines and strategies. Skjelbred sent me a link to NetCom’s social media guidelines, which are publicly published as a slideshare on slideshare.net, in advance of the interview, through e-mail. Also, Nielsen sent me Altibox’s social media strategy by e-mail after the interview was conducted, however this is not publicly available. The companies’ strategies and guidelines for social

media, likewise the interviews, have not been the subject of analysis, but have been used get increased information, and is presented in the analysis to clarify and describe the companies' use of social media.

### **3.3.2 Performing and Transcribing Interviews**

After the subjects of my interviews were chosen, I performed the interviews. Østbye et al. (2007) argues that qualitative interviews should start with specific questions, and then move to questions that requires reflection, and towards the end ask critical and controversial questions. Although the ideal of a qualitative interview is the non-controlled everyday conversation, the element of control must very often, both in terms of topic and time, be stronger than the ideal situation warrants (Holme & Solvang, 1996). Semi-structured interviews are identified as interviews where the topic is defined in advance of the interview. This approach provides flexibility because it is possible and natural to pursue unexpected or surprising input and to ask follow-up questions (Østbye et al., 2007). In semi-structured interviews it is common with an interview guide. In qualitative interviews one wishes that the opinions expressed should be the result of the respondents own understanding. Therefore, it is important that the respondent in the greatest extent possible controls the development of the interview. Nevertheless, in advance the researcher has a certain opinion on matters that are central to clarify during the interview. These opinions can be written down in an interview guide. The interview guide should not necessarily be followed point by point, but it is important that the interviewer during the interview covers the topics the guide contains (Holme & Solvang, 1996: 95, 96).

My interviews are characterized by the presentation given above. Based on the fact that the aim of my interviews was to get information related to the topic of my thesis, an interview guide was necessary for my interviews. I made an interview guide in advance of the interviews to make sure I covered topics related to my thesis during the interviews, and used an audio recorder during the interview. My interview guide was categorized into main topics, with questions relevant for my thesis (see Appendix A for interview guide). I started the interview with specific question regarding where the interview subject worked, occupation and the respondent's duties, tasks and what the respondent defined as engagement. Then, I moved to topics that required reflection. Here, I asked questions regarding how the company, which the respondent represented, created engagement and questions regarding why the

respondent's company wanted to create engagement. Towards the end I asked questions regarding improvements and challenges in relation to engagement. Furthermore, my interviews were conducted in Norwegian, since Norwegian is both my and my interview subjects' native language. This was to get a better understanding and create a better flow in the interviews, and as far as possible, to exclude any possible disturbances and linguistic misunderstandings.

After the interviews were conducted, I transformed the recorded interviews into written form. Kvale and Brinkmann recommend that transcriptions be done shortly after the interviews to decrease the possibility of misunderstandings and deficiencies (2009). Because of this, I transcribed the interviews in short time after the interviews to decrease this risk, as may occur over time. I chose to first transcribe the interviews word-by-word in Norwegian. Because the interviews were not the subject of analysis and only to be used with an informative purpose, I then translated and transformed the interviews into a more holistic and written style text, excluding frequent repetitions. I also sent the transformed texts to my interview subjects through e-mail, and asked for their opinions and feedback, to make sure that I was able to render the interviews as correctly as possible, and to decrease possible misunderstandings and deficiencies.

### ***3.4 Research Quality***

Reliability, validity and generalizability are terms related to the quality of research. However, generalizability, validity and reliability are terms most commonly used in quantitative studies (Østbye et al., 2007), and, as mentioned, this thesis is based on a qualitative approach. In general, qualitative methods provide greater opportunities to go in detail and in-depth into individual situations, rather opportunities of generalizable and statistical data. On the other hand, Østbye et al. argues that the issues reliability, validity and generalizability describe can also be relevant to qualitative methods, or that it is at least fruitful to use the terms as a basis for discussion (2007). Regardless of method, reliability, validity and generalizability are important to draw attention to the data and processing of data, and the types of response the data and analysis provides about the research field to be identified (2007: 116). In this section, I will explain and discuss my research's reliability, validity and generalizability.

### 3.4.1 Reliability

Reliability concerns the study's accuracy and authenticity, the quality of the data collection, processing and analysis. A high degree of reliability is obtained when independent measurements of the same phenomena provide the same, or almost the same, result (Holme & Solvang, 1996). Holme and Solvang state that it is not possible to conduct a flawless data collection or analysis process, because some errors will occur (1996). Reliability, validity and generalizability are gradual. There is rarely talk about the research being either reliable or unreliable, but to what degree the research is reliable (Østbye et al. 2007). Therefore, a researcher's task is to strive for a minimum degree of errors in the various research processes. Research that contains a low degree of reliability will also be unlikely to provide insight into the research question. High or a satisfying degree of reliability is therefore a prerequisite to test the allegations the research question involves (Holme & Solvang, 1996). Østbye et al. explain that an important aspect when it comes to reliability is reproducibility and intersubjectivity, but when using qualitative methods the researcher often uses herself as a research instrument (2007). Nevertheless, as mentioned above, we should strive for reliability, or it is at least prominent to discuss.

First, my main selection of data consists of two companies' posts and comments on two companies' Facebook pages. These Facebook pages, including their comments and posts, are public, available for anyone. Moreover, this information is available independent of time. In a research reliability perspective, this means that anyone can go back and verify data collected from these Facebook pages, provided that the companies choose to maintain the information. Also, because I have presented the days the data is collected from, one will be able to track posts and comments to the exact day. Through the data collection, I have also taken screenshots of these posts and comments and provided my text with the screenshots as examples to illustrate acclamations. Hence, the screenshots provided in the texts can serve as proof of my statements in the analysis.

I have also tried to ensure reliability by giving accurate descriptions of the approach and by rendering the process of interpretation. This way others can understand the choices I have made and evaluate the process. However, the categories that I have made cannot be said to mutually exclusive, where some of the strategies and subcategories could also have been placed differently as they sometimes overlap. Mutually exclusive categories are important

when quantifying data (Østbye et al., 2007). Yet, this quantification is not an attempt to conduct a quantitative method. It is rather based on an attempt of making a simple quantification to support the qualitative method, and to further be an aid in the analysis process. In addition, it is possible that there exists or could have been additional or other strategies. This analysis process has been limited to concern a specific time period, and the categories are based on my subjective opinion, which can create challenges for the study's reliability. I have also chosen to base my analysis on theoretical perspectives such as engagement, social media and the established theory of dialogue. Basing my analysis on these perspectives can provide reliable guidelines, creating reliability to some extent. Overall, based on the theoretical framework, the occurring tendencies and my understanding, I feel that the strategies I have identified may provide the thesis with an understanding of how NetCom and Altibox create engagement on Facebook.

In the context of qualitative interviews, reliability concerns whether the person being interviewed will change answers during the interview and if another person was to conduct the same interview, would get the same answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 245). Leading questions are especially relevant to reliability in interviews, specifically in relation to interview subjects who are easily impressionable (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 171). This perspective does not apply to my case since my interviews were performed with elites, believed to be experienced in interview situations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition, through my interview guide, I was able to formulate and follow open questions in advance and during the interview. I also pilot tested the interview guide with two communication consultants, to test what results was provided. Furthermore, I used the interview guide and key words to challenge and ask follow-up questions to gain a comprehensive understanding and insight into how and why NetCom and Altibox define and create engagement on Facebook.

Østbye et al. explains that recording an interview, rather than taking notes, will always be able to strengthen the methodological reliability in research, where recordings and transcription can provide the possibility of looking for correlations and reinterpretation of statements (2007: 118, 119). Nevertheless, as Kvale and Brinkmann explain, transcription implies transformation, where meanings provided orally may disappear when transformed into a written form (2009). I recorded the interviews to make sure I collected everything that was said and its meaning during the interview, and to have the opportunity to go back for a new

review to clarify uncertainties that I might have during the analysis process. I transcribed the interviews as fast as possible afterwards to make sure I retained the interview, meanings and context as I remembered it, in the written form. Finally, I translated and transformed the interviews into a more holistic and written style text, excluding frequent repetitions. I also sent these texts to my interview subjects through e-mail, so that they could inspect and confirm the transformed interview's reliability.

### **3.4.2 Validity**

Validity concerns that the study is genuine; that one measures what one aims to measure, and concerns the analysis and the result of operationalization. Here, one looks at the research design and operationalization about what degree they provide the relevant insight to the study's research question (Østbye et al., 2007: 118). Østbye et al. explain that reliability and validity together constitute the analysis' validity. Validity is related to how well one manages to capture concepts on a theoretical level of data collection and the analysis of this data. Østbye et al. discuss that generally the quantitative analysis' strength lies within keeping a high degree of reliability, while qualitative analysis might bring the researcher closer to the core of the theoretical concepts, and accordingly scores a high degree of validity (2007). Validity can be interpreted as research quality concerning if one actually answer's the research question one has selected, where the researcher must choose data collection methods and analysis methods based on the research question (Østbye et al., 2007). This thesis's theoretical contributions can thus be considered to strengthen the validity as it provides an established framework for the analysis. I also address how the analysis is performed, and systematically categorize the tendencies in an attempt to position findings in the empirical data.

My selection of data is restrained to a period of time and can therefore only provide a portrayal of tendencies during the selected days of that period. The period of time is limited to concern one week, and the data can therefore be affected by tendencies particular for that week. For example, occurrences and irregularities in that week will have a great impact on the collected data. Therefore, irregularities in the material may have a greater impact and outcome of my analysis and reflections. Based on this, any tentative answers to my research question will be based on data collected in that period of time, and may exclude tendencies that could have been important for my thesis. This creates a low degree of validity, and may be one of



this thesis' greatest weaknesses, as the aim of my research question is to form an understanding of how NetCom and Altibox create engagement in general. However, as presented, I was able to collect a large quantity of data from that one week, and therefore this might still provide me with diverse tendencies, and can therefore help strengthen the collected data's validity.

In addition, the thesis is based on a case study that investigates two organizations belonging to the same industry, as they both provides telecommunication services, and therefore provides little basis for saying anything about other organizations' circumstances and presence in social media. Selecting two organizations from the same industry has not been a conscious choice. As discussed, I chose NetCom and Altibox because they were two companies highly acknowledged for their use of social media. The basis for my study, and as demonstrated in my research question, is not to understand how industries affect engagement, nor will I discuss engagement in relation to telecommunication services. That both companies belong to the same industry can possibly also help decrease disturbances in my investigation, and help maintain a focus on the main topic of my research question: engagement.

One of the main challenges with validity in qualitative interviews is how and whether the interviewer's presence influences the interview subjects (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Østbye et al., 2007). The degree of validity will be impaired if the interview does not give a valid picture of the interview subject's understanding and opinions. Based on all my preparations preceding the interview, my interview guide during the interview, and transcription after the interview I believe I was able to create a prominent interview situation, and collect valid information from my interview subjects. Østbye et al. argues that a way to strengthen the validity of qualitative research is triangulation, where one compensates for weaknesses by combining different theoretical and methodological approaches (2007: 120). Yin defines triangulation in case studies as "the convergence of data collected from different sources, to determine the consistency of a finding" (2014: 241). My case study consists of a mixed method design, where the basis for my investigation is a qualitative content analysis and qualitative interviews, and can therefore be argued to increase my research's degree of validity. By combining content analysis and interviews, I can get a deeper understanding of relations affiliated my research question. As Østbye et al. explains, primarily conducting interviews may cause the researcher to only gain insight into "official versions" as answers to the questions (2007). Conducting a content analysis may enable a critical understanding of

these “official versions”. The basis for the interviews I have conducted is to collect information, and not to be subjects of analysis, though they do create a broader understanding of the phenomenon I am investigating and therefore helps increase the degree of validity.

Yin explains theory triangulation as triangulation “of perspectives to the same data set” (2014: 120). This approach is applicable to my thesis, as I apply different theoretical perspectives of engagement, dialogue and social media in my analysis. The combination of these theoretical perspectives sets the foundation for a dynamic and diverse interpretation of the phenomenon in relation to the research question, increasing the analysis’ validity. Another perspective of triangulation in case studies described by Yin is triangulation of data sources, where information is collected from multiple sources and where the case study’s findings are supported by these sources, defined as convergent evidence (2014). This case study consists of a holistic multiple-case design, where two cases are investigated: NetCom and Altibox. Yin argues that convergent evidence increases the degree of “construct validity”. Construct validity is an aspect of validity in case studies and identifies “correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Yin, 2014: 46). The aim of a case study is often to investigate a behavioral or social event, where findings describe a single reality. “Use of evidence from multiple sources would then increase confidence that your case study has rendered the event accurately” (Yin, 2014: 122) Using evidence from both Altibox and NetCom increases the validation of this case study, based on reproduction of the event (Yin, 2014).

### **3.4.3 Generalizability**

Some research aims to draw to conclusions that go beyond the phenomena that are observed and analyzed. Generalizability includes whether the analysis findings can be made universal and involves sampling a selection from a larger group and where the process consists of identifying individual elements as members of a general category (Østbye et al., 2007). This is linked to two factors, the number of units and the procedure for finding who should be included in the sample (Østbye et al., 2007: 27). Yin explains that it is not possible to generalize findings from a case study (2014). This is because a case study does not consist of sampling units and samples are insufficient in quantity to present a competent volume of samples generalizable for a larger population (Yin, 2014: 40). The goal of case studies is rather to expand and generalize theories (2014). A case study can be used to develop, adjust, advance, confirm or contradict theory, presented in the study, or it can be used to identify new

concepts derived from the research (Yin, 2014: 41). The aim of this study is not to generalize the findings to a larger population. Because this study is limited to the use of qualitative methods, a strategic sample of two companies, and the data collection is restricted to a specific time period; it is impossible to generalize the results to a larger population. In this way, how NetCom and Altibox create engagement on Facebook cannot be generalized to how other companies create engagement. Instead, I consider my research as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of engagement.

#### **3.4.4 Ethics**

An important consideration to make, as I am conducting research on communication through the public Internet, is ethics in relation to individuals' privacy (NESH, 2014). The Norwegian "National Research Ethical Committee for Social Science and Humanities", also called NESH, published in December 2014 ethical guidelines for research on the Internet. Here, they state that researchers can, as a general rule, freely use material from open forums without consent from those the information is regarding. At the same time this must always be evaluated based on the requirement of respect for individuals' privacy and close relationships (NESH, 2014: 4). As mentioned, the main method of my research is a qualitative content analysis, where my data is based on communication on NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages. Even though the aim of my research is to investigate how NetCom and Altibox communicate, people's public inquiries and responses to the companies, e.g. publics' Facebook posts and comments on the companies' Facebook pages, has also been included, through screenshots, as research data. The reason Facebook users' communication is included is not to be the aim of investigation, but to understand the context of which the companies communicate in and to gain a comprehensive picture of the companies' communication. In addition, I have included a selection of these screenshots in my analysis to substantiate my findings and discussion, and to illustrate tendencies in the companies' communication.

However, the collection and illustrations of people's Facebook posts and comments has been made without the authors of the messages' consent. The consideration to make here, even though the posts and comments are publicly available and have been posted in an open forum, is that people might be regard these posts as private. Or, they might acknowledge this information as public, but if asked, would not consent to it being used by others in a different context, such as research. Moreover, people might have different opinions of how private or

public an online site is. Based on this, it is important for researchers to consider peoples' and the context's integrity when conducting research online (NESH, 2014). This is especially applicable to social media, where the degree of public access, and the ability to set privacy settings vary between the users (NESH, 2014: 5).

First of all, since my research focuses on NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages, i.e. corporate Facebook pages that the companies have decided to keep public, I regard the context as public. For example, if the focus were rather to conduct research in relation to people's personal Facebook-profiles I would consider the context as private, as these forums contain a high level of private information. Corporate Facebook pages, on the other hand, is an arena where the content is related to the company that the page belongs to. Furthermore, the aim for my study is to investigate the companies' communication. However, as NESH's guidelines point out, various forms of interactions on the Internet will often have the effect of direct or indirect collection of information about people who are not subject to the research, referred to as third party (2014: 9). As mentioned, I have directly collected information about people, based on their communication with the companies. In this case, all personal identifiable information and information about personal relations must be kept confidential, unless consent has been given (NESH, 2014). As I have collected this information without consent, I have given no renderings in the analysis of personal or sensitive information of the people I have collected information about. Nor, is this information relevant for my thesis.

In addition, when I have presented screenshots as examples of people's Facebook posts and comments in the analysis, I have crossed and "blacked" out all personal identifiable information, as name, pictures, location, occupation, etc. Yet, quotes, as screenshots of Facebook posts and comments, can easily be traced by a full text or part text search, where the third party's identity may be revealed. On the other hand, in research it is important that the research data, and its content of meaning are not changed (NESH, 2014). Also, people communicating on behalf of the companies often sign their messages with their first name, and sometimes representatives from the companies appear in pictures published on their Facebook pages. In cases where I use pictures of the companies' representatives in my analysis I have blacked out their faces in the illustrated screenshots, because I cannot be sure of to what degree they have given their consent to have these published publicly. However, I have not blacked out people communicating on behalf of companies' names in the messages. This is because these people are present and communicate on behalf of the company, and not

on a personal or private basis, and aware they are communicating publicly on the companies' public Facebook pages. Finally, since my research focuses on Netcom and Altibox, their public Facebook pages, and that any personal identifiable information about third party has been kept anonymous or is "blacked out", I argue that I have considered people's and the context's integrity, without asking for consent from people that I have collected information about.

### **3.5 Summary**

Holme and Solvang explain that any reproduction of social conditions will have to be a simplification (1996: 71). This is because it is impossible to obtain a total overview of phenomenon one is investigating because one is not able to reproduce the phenomenon in its absoluteness. The research question provides us with what we seek knowledge about and the perspective creates the frames of what we see (Holme & Solvang, 1996). To answer the research question I have chosen to conduct a case study of how NetCom and Altibox create engagement in social media. The case study is based on two qualitative approaches: content analysis of NetCom and Altibox's communication on Facebook and interviews with two representatives from each company responsible for the company's use of social media. The qualitative content analysis is the main method of research and the purpose of the qualitative interviews are to get a broader and informative understanding of the content analysis. Collected data consists of NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages, and posts and comments during one week and transcriptions of the interviews. These are the basis for my analysis presented in the next chapter. In addition, the quality of research and considerations to make when investigating conditions through the Internet was presented through a discussion of reliability, validity, generalizability and ethics.

## **4 Analysis and Findings: Strategies for Engagement**

As mentioned, organizations rely on engagement to motivate publics to interact, dedicate and commit, and meet the organizations in dialogue through social media to create a foundation for building and maintaining relationships (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). In this chapter, NetCom and Altibox's communication, based on the collected data, will be discussed based on theory of engagement, dialogue and social media as framework, to identify the companies' strategies for engagement. However, before this discussion takes place, I will first give an overview of NetCom and Altibox's social media presence. This overview will be based on the interviews conducted with Morten Skjelbred from NetCom and Kjell Arild Nielsen from Altibox, in addition to information collected from the companies' social media strategy and guidelines. Information collected from the interviews will also be used in the discussion of NetCom and Altibox's strategies of engagement. Based on the collected data, I argue that NetCom and Altibox create engagement by facilitating interaction, aspiring for participation, committing to conversations, and by using attentive and personal communication. These are the four main strategies identified based on the categories and tendencies found in the data material, as discussed in chapter 3. Furthermore, in each strategy in the following analysis, different elements, or subcategories, based on the collected data, are presented, which constitutes each overall strategy. Hence, this chapter is divided into five main sections:

1. NetCom and Altibox in Social Media
2. They Facilitate Interaction
3. They Aspire for Participation
4. They Commit to Conversations
5. They Use Attentive and Personal Communication

### ***4.1 NetCom and Altibox in Social Media***

NetCom AS was established in 1989 and is the second largest Norwegian telecommunication company (NetCom, n.d.). In 2014 they had 1,6 million mobile customers (Roald, 2014). The company's operations are concentrated around mobile telephony and mobile data access with emphasis on the private market, but also offers telecom services for businesses (NetCom,

n.d.). Altibox is also a Norwegian telecommunication company, but distinguishes from NetCom based on products and services. Their activities are concentrated around services such as broadband, Internet, television and telephone, through fiber optic cable. In 2014 Altibox had 364 157 active customers, and is today the largest fiber network company in Norway (Joramo, 2015). NetCom and Altibox can be characterized as business-to-consumer companies, also defined as “B2C-companies”, which describes commercial transactions that take place between businesses and consumers, who are the end-users of products and services, rather than between businesses (Gale Encyclopedia of E-Commerce, 2002). On this basis, the companies rely on creating a prosperous foundation for building and maintaining relationships with consumers to be viable. To further build and maintain relationships NetCom and Altibox rely on communication, as relationships occur through communication.

As was initially mentioned, to be viable in society, organizations need to conduct successful, skilled and professional communication with groups they depend on (Ledingham, 2009). In this, social media is an important place for the companies to be. Through social media, based on their dynamic and interactive features, and millions of individual users’ presence, NetCom and Altibox can reach, communicate, and potentially build and maintain relationships with a diversity of consumers, or groups that the companies depend on. However, building or maintaining relationships require two-way communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ihlen, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014). In relation to this, the companies depend on publics’ interactions, commitment or dedication, where engagement is an important prerequisite. Therefore, for NetCom and Altibox to tap social media’s potential for relationship building, they rely on creating engagement with publics to foster a community or environment where participants are motivated to interact, and commit towards the companies (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Today, Altibox and NetCom use social media as platforms for public relations activities, and as channels for communication with stakeholder. In addition, as initially presented, they are acknowledged for their use of social media.

#### **4.1.1 NetCom**

NetCom entered the social media sphere in 2009. The company’s communication director at that time, Øyvind Vederhus, explain that when they entered the variety of social media platforms in 2009 they were met with feedback and inquiries, both negative and positive, existing without response or participation from them (2010). Conversations about NetCom

had always existed in spheres that were not accessible to the company. Based on this, NetCom decided to become present in social media so that they could participate in conversations that had used to be unavailable to them (Vederhus, 2010). Today, NetCom's social media presence is based on the following platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Google+, LinkedIn and a blog (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015). They have a Facebook page by the name "Get the most out of NetCom", and is the platform where they have the largest audience based on number of "page-likes" (<https://www.facebook.com/netcom/>). On Facebook, NetCom has almost 112 000 total page-likes, compared to Twitter, where they have approximately 7500 followers ([https://twitter.com/netcom\\_ks](https://twitter.com/netcom_ks)). Based on this comparison, Facebook is NetCom's biggest social media platform, and a place where they are able to reach a large audience.

Overall, NetCom's social media presence is justified through goals of creating positive customer experiences, open dialogue and establishing a high a degree of presence, based on the customer's premises (NetCom, 2014: slide 5). NetCom's social media presence is manifested in systematic plans for their use. As mentioned in the previous chapter, NetCom has what they define as "NetCom's social media guidelines" which are publicly published as a slideshare on slideshare.net, available for anyone to access. NetCom's guidelines refers to the company's overall use, goals and communication through social media, and applies for everyone and anyone who is present in social media on behalf of the company. "The guidelines apply as mnemonics for anyone working in NetCom on how to behave when present on behalf of the company in social media" (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015). In addition to their guidelines, NetCom, on a continually basis, work out an editorial plan for when, what and where they are going to communicate (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015). The editorial plans are interrelated with the company's main activities and is an extension of their market initiatives, overarching plans and strategies. This typically applies to status updates they post in social media. The plans are also flexible so that they can adapt based on things that might occur and be more important compared to what was originally planned to communicate. NetCom has an editorial group who works with the strategic use of social media and are responsible for the editorial plan, and to create content for their status updates (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015).

Moreover, NetCom use social media as channels for customer service, and Skjelbred explains that they experience that the majority of social media users' inquiries are related to customer



service (in interview, February 20, 2015). Together with the editorial group, they have a team of customer service representatives who communicates on behalf of the company in social media. NetCom has ten customer representatives who are responsible for engaging in customer service related communication that typically involves responding to inquiries by publics on their social media platforms. These people are trained in customer service communication through social media and are secluded from customer service communication through other traditional communication platforms (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015). In addition, NetCom state in their social media guidelines that they encourage all their employees to be active in social media on behalf of the company, provided that they are precise in their communication on who they are and where they work (NetCom, 2014).

#### **4.1.2 Altibox**

Kjell Arild Nielsen, who started working in Altibox in 2011, is Altibox's senior digital manager. Nielsen explains that when he entered the company in 2011, Altibox was lacking a focus on social media. He explains, "there had been some enthusiasts within Altibox who had taken on the responsibility of answering customers and use social media in general, but this was done spontaneous and randomly" (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015) A plan or strategy for why and how they should be present in social media did not exist. Therefore, when Nielsen started working in Altibox, he changed their approach, and introduced a systematic and strategic way of using social media (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015). Nielsen says that their presence is based on the belief that one can no longer choose not to be present in social media: "one has to be present, because social media is the place where your customers are" (in interview, February 26, 2015).

Today, Altibox has a social media strategy, however, as mentioned, this strategy is not publicly available. Their social media strategy states that Altibox's goals for being present in social media are: to give customers increased customer satisfaction through prosperous dialogue, strengthen knowledge of Altibox and sales through increased exposure of products and services, to create a more personal relationship between Altibox and the customer by creating engagement, and to create trust (Nielsen, 2014). Altibox has by 2014 chosen to be present on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram and YouTube (Nielsen, 2014). The company has a Facebook page titled "Altibox", and just like NetCom, Facebook is

Altibox's largest social media platform, where they have 96 000 "followers" or "page-likes" (<https://www.facebook.com/Altibox>).

In addition to their social media strategy, Altibox has a content strategy. Their content strategy addresses the creation and sharing of posts in social media, and is based on three main components: type of content, and time and frequency of posting the content. Accountable for this strategy and plan is a group of people, identified as the "SOME-team", who are responsible for creating social dialogue, and to share information and news (Nielsen, 2014). Moreover, like NetCom, Altibox use social media for customer service. Here, all Altibox employees and a group of eight customer service representatives, who must go through a certification course for customer service communication, are responsible for customer service monitoring and responding. The group of customer service representatives is named KS247, which stands for customer service 24 hours, seven days a week. KS247 focus on customer inquiries and communication in social media, and similar to NetCom, are secluded from customer communication through phone and other traditional communication platforms (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015).

#### ***4.2 They Facilitate Interaction***

NetCom and Altibox's first strategy of engagement can be identified based on how the companies have chosen to use Facebook as a communication channel and herein define how they are available, and thus facilitate publics' interaction. Facebook's infrastructure is based on openness, and contains interactive features, that enable interactivity. Kent and Taylor emphasize how organizations should facilitate participation to create dialogue (2002). Through Facebook, the companies are provided with the possibility of being accessible, present and decrease the threshold for participation and communication. As Taylor and Kent argue engagement assumes accessibility and presentness (2014). Engagement is based on dialogue (Taylor & Kent, 2014), ergo organizations must be accessible and present for dialogue to create engagement. Therefore, I interpret NetCom and Altibox's use of Facebook as a platform for communication, as a desire to create an environment where dialogue and engagement can take place.

### **4.2.1 The Platform's Openness**

NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages can be said to entail openness, where the companies facilitate for anyone and everyone to gain insight to-, and participate on the companies' Facebook pages. Theunissen and Wan Noordin explain that dialogue involves including as many as possibly in communication (2012). Kent state that most often social media are entirely open, where anyone can post messages, comment and participate in conversations (2010). Facebook is characterized as a social networking site, and is open for anyone who wants to join through a user-profile, provided that they have an Internet-connection. Social networking sites are distinguished from other sites based on public profiles and visible lists of friends that one is connected to, and where it is common to be able to leave visible messages, or comments, on each other's profiles (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Gershon, 2013). For example, on Facebook one connects with other people or organizations by becoming "friends" with them, "liking" or "following" their Facebook pages. As previously identified, NetCom has almost 112 000 page-likes, and Altibox has approximately 96 000 on Facebook. In this, they have 112 000 and 96 000 people following their Facebook pages, which can involve anyone who wants updates and insight to the companies' Facebook pages, or to participate and interact with the companies.

In addition, Facebook pages are based on asynchronous connections or relationships (Aalen, 2015), where users can be connected to the companies' Facebook pages independent of the companies' acceptance. Furthermore, Facebook pages are open for everyone. Here, Facebook users can gain insight to the pages' content, comment and participate, without being connected to the pages. Therefore, liking or following the page is not a prerequisite to gain insight or participate. As a result, all Facebook users that may have a benefit or interest of gaining information about NetCom and Altibox are the companies' potential audience of communication. Theunissen and Wan Noordin state that to create dialogue anyone who feels affiliated to the organization should be given the opportunity to participate (2012). Publics should decide if they have a stake in the organization, and not the other way around (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). In this context, NetCom and Altibox, based on the openness of their Facebook pages, may appear as present and accessible, and facilitate participation for all Facebook users who feel affiliated with the companies. Furthermore, through a combination of social media platforms and new technology, typically hand-held

devices as smartphones and pads, people can access information about the companies through Facebook, at anytime and anywhere (Kent, 2013).

Based on the public nature of NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages, people can access information they assumingly would not be able to find anywhere else. For example, in addition to the information the companies convey, people can gain insight to messages or comments from other users. Through these messages, people can find information regarding other Facebook users' experiences, questions and opinions towards NetCom and Altibox, and observe the companies' responses, generating a well-informed Facebook user. Kent and Taylor emphasize, in relation to online dialogue, that online sites should provide available, useful and valuable information for publics (1998). Skjelbred explains that, because of the large amount of information that their Facebook page consist of, it is become common for their followers to use Facebook for self-service, where they scan NetCom's Facebook page for the information they need, without interacting (in interview, February 20, 2015).

Kent argue that despite interactivity being the core tenet of all social media, social networking sites often consist of lurkers; people who reads and scans through social media posts and updates without interacting any further (2010). In the context of engagement, this can be seen as problematic; as engagement refers to some form of interaction (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2013; Men & Tsai, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014; Tsai & Men, 2013). On the other hand, engagement evolves around commitment and dedication (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2014; Zhang et al., 2011) and a Facebook user or follower who does not interact can be perceived as dedicated or committed. Nielsen agrees with this and explains that he believes that a passive Facebook user can also be a user who is engaged (in interview, February 26, 2015). Therefore lurkers do not necessarily provide a challenge for engagement on Facebook. Based on the public nature of the companies Facebook pages, Facebook users are able to obtain and access information useful and of value to them without interacting, creating a foundation for engagement and dialogue.

Skjelbred states "our Facebook page serve as an information channel for Facebook users and for the company" (in interview, February 20, 2015). Here, users can visit their Facebook pages and get information relevant to them, and where the companies can get information about their customers, their needs and feedback on products and services, through the messages and comments users leave on their Facebook pages. Therefore, because of the

openness social media entails, not only can publics access information about the companies, but also the companies can access information about their publics. Theunissen and Wan Noordin point to the importance of knowing whom one's publics are to create dialogue (2012). On Facebook, individuals interact through user-profiles, identifying who they are, where NetCom and Altibox can access users' profiles and collect information regarding their publics, provided that the user has a public profile. Taylor and Kent also propose as a first component of engagement that organizations must conduct secondary research to understand issues, key publics and cultural variables before any interaction can take place (2014). Through Facebook, NetCom and Altibox are provided with insight that lets them increase their knowledge of publics' opinions and issues concerning the companies, and gain overview of who their publics are.

However, the openness of the companies' Facebook pages presumably also creates challenges for NetCom and Altibox. First, publics might be reluctant in participating in public conversations on Facebook. Taylor and Kent also explain that the public nature of social media is problematic in relation to engagement, as dialogue is usually not public (2014). Yet, NetCom and Altibox's high level of accessibility can probably decrease the barrier of approaching the company. In addition, by being publicly present and accessible through Facebook, NetCom and Altibox open up for that everyone can post exactly whatever they want on the companies' Facebook pages. Herein, anyone feeling affiliated with the organization can post equally criticism and praise on the companies' Facebook pages, publicly available for anyone to access. As Kent (2010) and Aalen (2015) discusses, this poses a challenge for organizations because it creates an arena for dissatisfied publics or customers, where they can expose their dissatisfaction, open and publicly for anyone to see. Accordingly, publics can gain insight to Facebook users' negative experiences with the companies that as a result may have a negative impact on the companies' reputation.

On the other hand, this addresses an important element of dialogue: risk. Where to engage in dialogue depends on a degree of risk (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Risk is identified as the organization's will to interact with publics although there is a risk of exposure, and consequences of the dialogue are unclear (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Tsai and Men discuss how organizations are more likely to be perceived credible on social networking sites as users can interact by giving their opinions, identifying errors and correct the organization, publicly for anyone to see (2013). This, in turn, engenders users to perceive organizational social

networking pages as credible, and the organization as trustworthy (Tsai & Men, 2013). As NetCom and Altibox have chosen to use Facebook as a channel for communication, they demonstrate a willingness to be present and accessible although this poses a potential risk for the companies. This serves NetCom and Altibox with the possibility to be perceived as credible, open and trustworthy, as publics can access conversations that they probably would be excluded from anywhere else. Moreover, this aspect does not only pose a challenge for the companies, it also creates an opportunity, as publics can also gain insight to positive feedback and inquiries from other Facebook users, and give a positive impression of the companies. As Men and Tsai argue, through community based social networking sites, other users' feedback and interaction, enriches organizational pages' attractiveness and informativeness (2013).

By having chosen to use Facebook as a channel for communication, NetCom and Altibox are provided with the opportunity to be accessible and present at a high level for publics, establishing a foundation for creating and achieving dialogue and engagement. Through the companies' public Facebook pages, publics can access information at a whole new level, and the companies are perceived as open in relation to their activities and available to anyone who wants access. In addition to the platform's openness, Facebook offers features that enable interactivity, and that further strengthen the capability of participation, and the companies' accessibility and presentness. In the next discussion this will be discussed, i.e. how NetCom and Altibox, through Facebook, facilitate, and are present and accessible for participation, based on Facebook's interactive features.

#### **4.2.2 Facebook's Interactive Features**

By using Facebook as a platform for communication, NetCom and Altibox also facilitate for publics to participate and communicate with the companies through interactive features. Social media is based on interactive features that are said to carry opportunities for dialogue (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ihlen, 2013; Kent, 2010, 2013). Propinquity is a part of dialogue, and concerns that both parties must participate in matters that affect either party, where publics must be informed about issues and state issues that concern them (Kent & Taylor, 2002). First of all, through Facebook, NetCom and Altibox can initiate contact and topics of their concern, by posting messages on their Facebook pages' wall, featured as "status updates". Further, they can spread and share this information with a large audience, based on

the large number of users present. Also, Facebook facilitate for Facebook users to post inquiries and initiate topics of their own concern on the companies' Facebook pages' wall.

Not only does Facebook facilitate for the companies and Facebook users to post messages, but also for anyone to participate and join the conversation, and respond to the messages, and following conversational posts, featured as "comments" to the initial message. Kent defines this feature as "threaded dialogue", and explains that this provides social networking sites as Facebook with means that facilitate dialogue (2010). Through threaded dialogue, conversational posts appear in chronological order and in real time and are publicly available for anyone to see over time (Kent, 2010). Yet, as mentioned, Facebook users might be reluctant in participating in a public dialogue. In relation to this, Facebook offers the feature of private messages (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Gershon, 2013). Here, in addition to public conversations through threaded dialogues, Facebook users can communicate privately. Also, similar to threaded dialogues is what Kent and Taylor defined as dialogic loops on the Internet (1998). Dialogic loops refer to the possibility of getting direct feedback on communication, enabling dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

The threaded dialogue is something that NetCom and Altibox use as the basis for their communication with Facebook users. By using this feature NetCom and Altibox facilitate for Facebook users and followers to respond and interact with the companies on Facebook, and are perceived as accessible and present for their participation. Threaded dialogue, or dialogic loops, lowers the threshold for publics to respond and participate. Therefore, by actively using this feature, NetCom and Altibox show a desire to meet publics in dialogue. Here, the companies are provided with the possibility of facilitating a two-way benefit of information, and further create dialogue and engagement. Through Facebook, NetCom and Altibox are able to facilitate publics' participation. Moreover, because anyone can participate in the threaded dialogue, Facebook users do not necessarily rely solely on getting a response from the companies, through the threaded dialogue, to participate or to be engaged. The motivation of engagement also involves participating with other people belonging to the group, and not only the organization (Taylor & Kent, 2014; Zhang, et al., 2011). Men and Tsai also found community identification to be an important antecedent of engagement (2013). Herein, Facebook users can participate with each other on the companies' Facebook pages.

Furthermore, in relation to propinquity, as defined above, Kent explains how social networking sites have the potential to create a sense of intimacy or closeness in social media (2010). Through social networking sites, as Facebook, one can build relationships based on feelings of cohesion between the users (Kent, 2010). Propinquity first of all depends on the communication to happen in a place that is shared between the parties (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Facebook is a shared space between Altibox, NetCom and Facebook users, where Facebook is a place where the users are present independent of the companies. Furthermore, Kent and Taylor argue that to create online dialogue, an online site should be user friendly and intuitive to use (1998). Because Facebook is a platform that the users are formerly familiar with, as it a place where they already are present, the users have knowledge of how to use the platform. As a result, publics can easily access and navigate through NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages, a shared space between Facebook users and the companies, in an environment they are familiar with how to use.

To create dialogue, Kent and Taylor explain that the communication must also be present (2002). This is another characteristic of propinquity, where dialogic participants must be involved in communication when the issue occurs (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Kent states that social media allow for real-time interaction and short response times (2010). Through threaded dialogues NetCom and Altibox are provided with the opportunity of being available in real-time and responding shortly after the initial inquiry is posted. Conversations based on real-time and short time responses enable the conversations to imitate human and face-to-face conversations, an ideal in dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In addition, through Facebook, publics can approach NetCom and Altibox at their leisure, compared to other traditional communication channels, as the phone. They are not dependent on a representative from the company to answer the phone, and instead can be notified when the company has responded. For example, inquiries posted during a time when the companies are unavailable, will be still available for the company to respond to when they are available. This strengthens the companies' opportunity of responding to all inquiries.

However, the new technology has also created challenges for organizations, as people have become harder to reach and are more disintegrated. Publics or stakeholders are no longer regarded as having one shared public knowledge, but instead people have started to individually select what information they want to relate and listen to (Kent, 2013). This creates challenges for NetCom and Altibox and where additional requirements need to be met



to be able to create engagement with publics. First of all, social media are interchangeable, where the companies' Facebook pages and participation within these pages, are interchangeable and can easily be replaced (Kent, 2010).

Also, through social media it is harder for NetCom and Altibox to control and participate in conversations concerning themselves, where it is often publics that control the conversation. Coombs and Holladay refers to this, and state that by being present on the Internet, power and control is shared between the participants (2010). Here, publics are often in control, and guide and choose the topics of conversation (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). For example, on the companies Facebook pages, based on their openness and interactive features, Facebook users can easily choose and initiate topics of their concern. Also, Kang argue that a characteristic of engagement is empowerment (2014). Thus, through Facebook users can voice their opinions, suggest change, or demand bettering, towards the companies (Tsai & Men, 2013). Furthermore, outsiders, other Facebook users or followers can participate in these conversations and avail themselves of what they think. In this, they are not dependent on the companies' participation, and Facebook users' feedback, communication and comments are publicly available for anyone to see. Here, by being present and accessible through Facebook, NetCom and Altibox's communication may be believed to be on publics' premises, where publics can control the conversations. Nielsen refers to this and states that: "in social media we respond to the customer when it is convenient for the customer, we are present where the customer wants to contact us, and not where it is suitable for the company" (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015).

In addition, Facebook's size presumably creates challenges for the companies to be able to reach Facebook users, and further create engagement. One challenge is based on Facebook's news feed, which consists of an abundance of information for each Facebook user (Aalen, 2015; Haugseth, 2013). Here, NetCom and Altibox have to compete with the tangle of friends' status updates, posts, pictures and videos, and information from other brands that the user might follow. Skjelbred discuss that Facebook does not necessarily function as the most prominent channel for engagement:

We experience a lot more engagement on Instagram, where we only have 3000 followers compared to the 112 000 we have on Facebook. Instagram is a channel where it is easier to

reach our followers, because it is a smaller platform. It requires more to create engagement on Facebook, a much bigger channel (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015).

Facebook also consist of algorithms that are created to spread messages or content that Facebook perceives as relevant to the user (Aalen, 2015). This is based on the user's activity, connections and interests. It is those who have had a form of interaction with the author of the message before, that receive the author's posts. Skjelbred explain that this poses challenges for organizations as a users' relationship with friends are often stronger than the relationship to a brand (in interview, February 20, 2015). Therefore, information regarding friends are promoted and made visible for individual users in a higher degree by Facebook. Also, a post's popularity or the content of the post, for example if it contains a picture, are factors that gives the post a higher degree of reach and visibility on Facebook (Aalen, 2015). Skjelbred states that as a result it is difficult to get through to potential new followers as well as their own followers on Facebook (in interview, February 20, 2015).

Nevertheless, NetCom and Altibox arguably are perceived as accessible and present by having chosen to use Facebook as a channel for communication with publics. They facilitate publics' interaction through use of threaded dialogues, and where publics have the opportunity to interact with the companies in real-time, and through short response times. Their accessibility is further strengthened as publics can easily access NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages, a shared space between Facebook users and the companies, in an environment they are familiar with how to use. The companies' facilitation of interaction, through Facebook's features, can be interpreted as NetCom and Altibox's desire of building a foundation for dialogue and engagement with publics. Social media is claimed to be a prominent place for dialogue and to create engagement in (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Yet, research conducted shows that organizations are not fully tapping social media's potential for dialogue, and relationship building; one-way communication is the dominating form (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ihlen, 2013; Waters, et al., 2009). The next section will concern how NetCom and Altibox communicate through Facebook to create interaction, and how they tap Facebook's potential for dialogue and engagement.

### ***4.3 They Aspire for Participation***

The analysis of the companies' communication on Facebook shows that the companies actively aspire for publics' participation. As discussed, Facebook empowers possibilities for the companies to create dialogue, but this is dependent on how organizations make use of the opportunities the platform provides (Kent & Taylor, 1998). NetCom and Altibox both offer to help their customers or Facebook users, and encourage Facebook users to approach the companies when in need of help. In addition, they both frequently post messages containing appealing information to engage Facebook users to participate and give their feedback. I interpret these means as a desire to create dialogue and achieve engagement. Kent and Taylor state that to create dialogue organizations should acknowledge the value of publics by encouraging publics to participate (2002). Also, Taylor and Kent argue that engagement assumes willingness to interact (2014). Therefore, to motivate publics to interact, and further create engagement, the companies must demonstrate that they are willing to interact and that publics' participation is something that they pursue.

#### **4.3.1 Offer "Help"**

A strategy found on the companies' Facebook pages that substantiate how they aspire for participation is by offering help, and in this encourage Facebook users to approach the companies. Both NetCom and Altibox identify how they are available on their Facebook page. As initially, presented both companies have implemented their Facebook pages as channels for customer service. Here they encourage Facebook users or followers to participate and approach NetCom and Altibox with input concerning their products, services or brand. Kent critically argues that in the current field of public relations, communication professionals often use social media as a tool for organizational marketing initiatives, advertising, exploiting stakeholders, and promotion (2013). Because NetCom and Altibox use Facebook as a channel for customer service, may indicate that they use social media for more than just marketing and promotion. Among others, both companies state that their goals of being present in social media is to be present for customers, create dialogue and positive experiences for customers, to strengthen their brand and reputation (NetCom, 2014; Nielsen, 2014). It is probably also an advantage for the companies to have a clear goal of their social media use and Facebook pages, so that there exists a mutual understanding of what the Facebook page should be used for, everyone's roles within the pages, and how to contribute.

In this way, the companies are probably able to avoid misunderstandings and aimless interactions without purpose or direction. As a result, public customer service communication through Facebook appears as a prosperous way to create engagement.



Illustration 1:

- *Altibox: “Did you know that Altibox has 24 hour customer service in social media? No red days, no breaks. Gladly share this with your Altibox friends, so that they can also receive help exactly when they need it 😊”*

On NetCom’s Facebook page a short description is presented stating that: “We would gladly like to help you make your life a little easier. We are here to help, so that you can be close to everything and everyone who is important to you”. Altibox’s “Page info” states “Altibox help you at all times throughout the year. Here you can keep up to date on the latest news, participate in exciting contests and much more”. These informational texts show that first of all NetCom encourage Facebook users to participate with the company and initiate topics when in need of help. In the text, NetCom also demonstrates that they are present for the benefit of the user and refers to the services the company provides, as they state that they are available to help users be close to everything and anyone. This closeness that NetCom refers to is presumably closeness created through telecommunication services, which they provide, as Internet access and phone use. Altibox also offers help, but also encourage users to keep

updated with the company and participate in relation to this. By stating that the companies are present to help, the companies demonstrate that they are accessible, present and willing to interact for the benefit of the user, and they encourage users to interact when they need help. Another example is shown in *Illustration 1*, where Altibox, through a status-update, informs about their customer service on Facebook, and state that they are available to help customers at any day and any time. Furthermore, they suggest that people should share the information with friends so that they can also receive help. Nielsen also underlines their customer service communication as a form of engagement and states:

Altibox's main form of engagement on Facebook is through customer service related communication, because prominent customer service creates positive relations that further increase the chance of engagement. Most often the first contact between a Facebook user and Altibox is established because the user has a challenge based on experienced quality. Here the user has a problem and wishes to resolve that problem. Therefore it is customer service that most often drives the engagement and traffic on our Facebook page (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015).

Yet, an aspect of encouraging Facebook users to approach the companies in relation to customer service is that most often when someone addresses customer service, it is usually because one has a problem, or a challenge based on experienced quality, with the companies. Herein, anyone feeling affiliated with the organization can post equally criticism and praise on the companies' Facebook pages, publicly. Taylor and Kent argue that there should exist a mutual understanding between the organization and publics towards suggesting topics and changing the topics of conversations to create engagement (2014). Here, they discuss that organizations need to approach topics that are difficult for the organization (Taylor & Kent, 2014). By encouraging publics to participate and approach the companies when they have a problem and might be dissatisfied with their experience, the companies demonstrate that they are willing to approach topics that might be difficult for the organization. On this basis, they gain the opportunity to display their helpfulness, and demonstrate that they are truly dedicated to serving the interests of their publics, and as a result Facebook users may see it beneficial to interact. Hence, they demonstrate that they are seeking participation from Facebook users, no matter what the consequences are, and a willingness to engage in a dialogue, where risk is present (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

In Taylor and Kent's attempt to conceptualize engagement they propose that engagement requires interaction with publics for their advice and counsel on issues of organizational, public or community concern (2014: 391). In this, the companies must involve and include publics in relation to their organizational, public or community activities on Facebook, and demonstrate a willingness to interact regarding these issues. Kang also explains that a characteristic of engagement is empowerment (2014). Based on the openness of their Facebook pages, Facebook's interactive features that allow publics to directly and easily interact with the companies or other users, enabling and encouraging Facebook users' participation through customer service communication, the companies' Facebook pages serves as important platforms for empowerment (Kang, 2014; Tsai & Men, 2013). By enabling their Facebook pages as platforms for customer service, users can voice their opinions, suggest change, or demand bettering, whereby the companies and users can cooperate towards mutual improvement. And as Tsai and Men argue: "the motivation of empowerment thereby refers to the use of social media to exert influence and enforce excellence" (2013: 78).

In addition, NetCom and Altibox also identify when they are available for communication on Facebook. On NetCom's Facebook page, Netcom state what time they are available for communication: "We answer any inquiries on Facebook weekdays 08-20, and 10-18 on weekends". Altibox has not published what time they are available to respond to publics on Facebook, but Nielsen states in interview (February 26, 2015), and as shown in *Illustration 1*, that they have chosen to be available 24 hours, seven days a week. It is NetCom and Altibox's social media customer service representatives that are first of all responsible for responding to inquiries during these hours (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015; Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015). Here, the companies have representatives primarily available everyday for communication on Facebook, and have taken deliberate choices of time for when they are available for communication. As NetCom and Altibox encourage Facebook users to interact in a given time that the companies' customer service representatives are available to participate, they demonstrate a dedication to publics' participation. This can further be interpreted as a strategy to create interaction, as publics might be more willing to participate in a time that they know the company is available for their participation. Also, Taylor and Kent discuss that for organizations to engage in dialogue, organizations should inform publics of the amount of time they will use to respond (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

An important aspect of NetCom and Altibox's social media communication is that it is twofold. Based on this, Skjelbred explains that how they create engagement can also be divided into two main groups:

Our first form of engagement can be identified as customer approached engagement, where users actively approach us seeking help or information, where dialogue between the user and a customer service representative is often created to solve the problem. The other form of engagement is where we try to engage users in messages concerning our products, services, and information in general. These messages are most commonly created in our editorial plan for strategic use (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015).

As a result, NetCom and Altibox's social media communication, and how they create engagement, can be divided into two main categories: communication through customer service, i.e. responses to inquiries initiated by social media-users, and communication through status updates, i.e. initiated communication by the companies. Further, the next section will elaborate upon how the companies communicate through status updates and aspire for interaction through the communication they initiate.

#### **4.3.2 Convey Appealing and Useful Information**

The importance of online communication environment's usefulness is often stressed in relation to online relationship cultivation and building dialogue. In this they often refer to the information the environments provide (Taylor & Kent, 1998; Taylor, et al., 2001; Waters, et al., 2009). Kent and Taylor argue that online environments should contain useful and valuable information to attract and provide publics with a site they want to visit again and stay on, which further enables the possibility for dialogue (1998). Skjelbred also explain how NetCom's Facebook page's name "Get the most out of NetCom" reflects this. Skjelbred elaborates on their choice of name and explains that:

The basis for our Facebook page name, 'Get the most out of NetCom', reflects our fundamental strategy to get people, being either existing customers or curious about NetCom, to follow our Facebook page by making information, that one might not find anywhere else, available on our page (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015).

In the collected data, I found that most often NetCom and Altibox use Facebook's status-update feature to convey appealing and useful information for Facebook users or customers. I interpret this as a strategy to attract and engage Facebook users to participate in relation to the messages they convey, and to further get people to follow their Facebook page. Facebook, as discussed, enables interactivity, responsiveness and dialogue (Kent, 2010). However, these possibilities do not necessarily entail genuine dialogue. Achieving dialogue requires content that engages users to respond (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In week 16, Altibox posted four status updates on their Facebook page and NetCom posted ten updates. All of these 14 status updates were related to the companies' services, products or activities. Based on my analysis of the companies' status updates, the main tendency is that these messages contain appealing, and useful information for anyone feeling affiliated with the companies, in relation to what the companies have to offer. Useful, or appealing information, and frequent updates may give a positive picture of the companies as present, credible and trustworthy.



*Illustration 2:*

- *NetCom: “NetCom was the first in Norway to launch the big brother of 4G, namely 4G+ (LTE-A), and it happened in Kristiansand in the end of February. This summer an entire 1,5 millions will have access to 4G+ from us 😊”*



Kent and Taylor argue that to achieve dialogue, online organizations should offer useful, updated and valuable information (1998). In *Illustration 2* NetCom' announces the expansion and strengthening of their telecommunication coverage. This serves as useful, updated and valuable information for NetCom's existing customers as the message provide publics with information regarding the company's activities and development. This status-update may have positive impact on the services that NetCom's customers subscribe to, affecting their everyday use, and is therefore appealing information, and useful for customers as it may have direct impact or affect them. In addition, they may be appealing or useful for Facebook users in general, as they might see it beneficial to interact or to become a customer, if the message affects, or engages them. Taylor et al. emphasize how dialogue first of all involves attraction to achieve publics' desire to interact (2001). Through appealing and useful information, NetCom and Altibox pursue publics' feedback and interactions towards their products, services and brand.

As presented, Skjelbred explain that NetCom's aim for this communication is first of all participation from Facebook users (in interview, February 20, 2015). NetCom and Altibox's social media strategy and guidelines also demonstrates that they have a clear goal of creating interactivity and participation through their communication on Facebook (NetCom, 2014; Nielsen, 2014). Their status updates can therefore be said to have a strategic intent to get Facebook users to participate and interact in relation to what they communicate. Nielsen also emphasizes the importance of the information's relevance in relation to engagement: "to create engagement through our communication on Facebook the content must be relevant for users" (in interview, February 26, 2015). He suggests that, for example, messages containing useful tips about core products and services, and non-selling posts like warnings about fraud, has the ability to further create engagement (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015).

Altibox also include questions in their messages concerning information about products, services and the company's activities. Of Altibox's four status updates, three of them contained questions. In *Illustration 3* Altibox posts a picture of one of their products and invite Facebook users to name the product. They list several suggestions, but also ask if their users have any additional suggestions. Altibox appears genuinely interested in what Facebook users have to say regarding their message, by encouraging their advice and counsel. Asking questions in their message can be regarded as a strategy to get Facebook users to interact. As a result, this message has 478 comments, and of the 14 status updates collected from the two

companies, is the status-update with most comments. By asking questions, Altibox appear as genuinely interested in what Facebook users have to say in relation to the message and empathetic towards their opinions.



*Illustration 3:*

- Altibox: "We need a little help 😊 All Altibox-customers have a box where the fiber cable comes into the house. What do you think we should call the "box"? - Home central, - Fiber central, - Altibox-central, - Fiber box. Or do you think it should be called something else?"

NetCom does not add questions to their messages. However, through the threaded dialogue, Facebook users are invited to respond and interact towards NetCom and Altibox's status updates (Kent, 2010). This provides the companies with the opportunity of dialogue in relation to the original message. Here, users can easily intervene and participate in relation to topics the companies initiate, and the companies are perceived as willing to enter a dialogue in relation to the information they convey. In addition, the information the companies provide is probably perceived more credible when user can contribute with their input, and the

companies as more trustworthy (Tsai & Men, 2013). The affiliation towards organizations will probably also be strengthened when publics can provide feedback and feel that one's behavior has influence on the discussion or outcome, and further create engagement. Dialogue involves being open to change (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In relation to this, the companies do not necessarily need to ask for feedback. The opportunity to contribute with input is present, and as NetCom's status update illustrated in *Illustration 2* had approximately 30 comments, Facebook users seem to avail themselves of this to say what they think. This enables engagement and a dialogue through posts of a more informative and monologue character. Theunissen and Wan Noordin argue that before dialogue can happen, monologue should take place (2012). Monologue is what creates awareness, and building relationships require dialogue and awareness (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012).

Waters et al. refer to informative means as announcements, links, pictures, videos or audio files as most common forms of message dissemination to create interactions through social networking sites (2009). This is also a tendency found in NetCom and Altibox's communication, where all of their status updates during week 16 contain either a picture or video, and a link. The companies use pictures, videos and links that highlight their products or values closely related to their activities. By implementing visual communication in their messages, their posts are likely to be easier recognized and seem more appealing to the user. The companies' communication can also be perceived as a strategy of integration to Facebook, as a platform, to attract Facebook users attention. As mentioned, Facebook also entails challenges for NetCom and Altibox, in relation to be visible and being able to reach Facebook users, based on Facebook's large amount of information and algorithms. For example, if a message contains visual elements, based on Facebook's algorithms, this gives the post a higher degree of reach and visibility on Facebook (Aalen, 2015).

Through Facebook's algorithms, it is those who have had a form of interaction with the author of the message before, that receive the author's posts (Aalen, 2015). Based on this, it is probably favorable for the companies to convey appealing information and use visual elements to "stand out", be visible in the abundance of information and to create interactivity, to ensure that as many as possibly receives their message. Also, the post's popularity, in relation to how many interacts, or "like" the message, the larger degree of attention the message receives, and is visible to a greater extent, to additional Facebook users (Aalen, 2015). Moreover, as discussed in 4.2.2 *Facebook's Interactive Features*, social media are

interchangeable (Kent 2010), where one's connections and interactions are interchangeable means. On this basis, it may be important for NetCom and Altibox to offer Facebook users useful and appealing information to create interactivity, but also to conserve visitors on their Facebook page. NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages must have a continuous value for publics, as this sets the foundation for dialogic relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The information the Facebook pages provide can thus witness an effort to deduce Facebook users to their page by offering beneficiaries, as information they might not find anywhere else.

Social networks are centered on interactivity, and creating a social community between friends, where people interact, share information and communicate (boyd & Ellison, 2007). In this, the companies have adapted to Facebook's technology, where they communicate to create interactivity, and, based on my understanding, use this interactivity to create involvement in relation to the information they convey. Engagement is about creating mutual beneficiaries and a two-way exchange of communication (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Therefore, to create engagement, there must be a two-way exchange of the information the companies provide. Kent and Taylor argue that the main reason publics should want to come back and to stay on a site is the opportunity for dialogue (1998). Through NetCom and Altibox's status updates the companies provide Facebook users who feel affiliated with the companies appealing and useful information, in relation to their activities, and the opportunity to interact and give their opinions or feedback on this information. Hence, establishing Facebook pages consisting of useful and appealing information, users may experience following the companies' Facebook pages and interacting within these, as meaningful and beneficial (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In return, NetCom and Altibox are provided with the possibility of Facebook users' participation. Facebook users' participation can further increase their communication's reachability, where it can reach other Facebook users, and where they can engage additional Facebook users to participate.

On the other hand, NetCom and Altibox presumably also convey this appealing and useful information to appear as attractive companies for Facebook users to become customers. In this, the information they provide can also be perceived as a strategy to increase sales and entice people to become customers. As mentioned, Skjelbred also stated in interview that the second goal for this communication is that it results in sales (in interview, February 20, 2015). Yet, their posts do not involve typical sales characteristics, where for example prices are visible. Therefore, at first glance their posts do not appear as direct commercials. This can be

seen in the context that they are trying to integrate to social media and the socialness of the platform they communicate in (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison & boyd, 2013). Social media is perhaps not a channel where it would be appropriate to pursue direct sales and advertising.

Nevertheless, this form of communication does not affiliate with how Taylor and Kent considers engagement (2014). They consider engagement to be something more and meaningful, where publics should be included at a high level in organizational processes, and enable publics' advice and counsel on issues of organizational/public/community concern (Taylor & Kent, 2014) and where public can contribute to change (Kent & Taylor, 2002). It can be discussed in light of this to what degree Facebook users actually feel that participation and giving advice towards these messages, that contain relatively superficial information, contributes to something meaningful, as change. It is apparent that NetCom and Altibox are commercial companies which existence depends on making profit to sustain. Hence, it is debatable whether dialogue is a direct appropriate approach for the companies, but perhaps should rather be considered as a tool for how they communicate, to build and cultivate relationships with publics. Theunissen and Wan Noordin discuss this aspect and state that organizations will most often communicate through a desire of reaching goals favorable for the organization, and that dialogue therefore is not necessarily realistic to achieve (2012).

#### ***4.4 They Commit to Conversations***

Another prominent tendency found in the data material is that NetCom and Altibox appear as committed to conversations. Both companies pursue to respond to inquiries posted on their Facebook pages, and maintain the conversations to, most commonly, solve Facebook users problems. Commitment in dialogue refers to conversational commitment, where dialogic participants must be committed to a mutual conversation (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Here, the companies must demonstrate commitment towards publics' input, needs and experiences, where they show that they are dedicated to maintain the relationship, to create engagement (Kang, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). As presented, NetCom and Altibox both encourage Facebook users to participate. Hence, this strategy concerns how the companies commit to the participation they encourage.

#### 4.4.1 Respond to Inquiries

A central feature that I argue demonstrates that commitment to conversations is a prominent strategy of the companies' communication, is how they aspire to respond to inquiries from Facebook users. In week 16 I found that NetCom responded to almost all page posts from users, and Altibox responded to all (see Appendix B for table showing quantity of Facebook posts). By responding to inquiries the companies demonstrate that they are listening and willing to meet publics in dialogue. Kent and Taylor emphasize that to create dialogue the parties must be able to commit at a high level to the communication and be available (2002). This is the third feature of propinquity and what Kent and Taylor initially defined as engagement (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In this, to create engagement, in addition to being available as earlier discussed, the companies must also commit to the communication by responding to inquiries. Thus, responding to Facebook users inquiries demonstrates a commitment to publics' participation, and communication, and the encouragement of and invitations to participation may therefore be perceived as a sincere desire to create dialogue and engagement.

Taylor and Kent discuss that an organization must respond to all inquiries, ignoring inquiries represents an unwillingness to engage publics and achieve dialogue (2014). Both Skjelbred and Nielsen explain that responding to all inquiries is a deliberate choice, and based on a conscious strategy (in interview, February 20, 2015; in interview, February 26, 2015,). They state that they have a 99 percent response guarantee, and have a policy to respond to all inquiries, including negative and critical inquiries (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015). Because NetCom and Altibox aspire to respond to all inquiries Facebook users might be more willing to interact, as they know they can rely on getting a response, and the companies appear as credible. As discussed earlier, using Facebook as a channel for customer service, and facilitating Facebook users' feedback, entails a risk of negative feedback and criticism (Kent, 2010). Ignoring to respond to this form communication, may give the impression that the companies do not care, and demonstrates unwillingness towards dialogue and engagement. Publics can easily feel ignored if they are not heard, and trust might be lost (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

In addition, on Facebook, users can easily steer the topics and conversations, and it has become harder for organization to participate in conversations concerning themselves

(Coombs & Holladay, 2010). As presented, NetCom and Altibox have strategically chosen to respond to all inquiries, both negative and positive. This can also be perceived as a strategy to diminish negative feedback, keep criticism from escalating and to influence these forms of conversations (Aalen, 2015). NetCom and Altibox also have a conscious strategy to never delete any content in social media (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015; Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015). Skjelbred explain that: “We only delete posts that contain attacks against individuals or are contrary to Norwegian law” (in interview, February 20, 2015). As mentioned, Facebook enables moderation, or editorial supervision, which allows the page-owners, in this case being the companies, to edit content (Kent, 2010). Kent describes this aspect as antisocial (2010). Deleting negative content can be seen as manipulation of communication, while dialogue is based on genuine and sincere communication; manipulation is not dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002)

Yet, in some situations the organization does not need to diminish criticism or negative feedback. Men and Tsai refer to how organizations’ pages in social networking sites provide possibilities in relation to community based interactions, where users identify and interact with each other, which further enables commitment towards the organization (2013). Moreover, they also discuss that when other users share information about the organization the information is more likely to be perceived as credible (Tsai & Men, 2013). Nielsen reflects on this in the interview, and explains that because their Facebook pages are open and people can interact with each other, satisfied Facebook users sometimes help them diminish criticism from unsatisfied users:

For example, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2012, one of our products didn’t work for about two hours, and where our customers were visiting our Facebook page to find out what was happening. During these two hours we experienced a mass of inquiries and activity on our Facebook page, where our followers started defending Altibox and responding to negative feedback from other followers due to the failure in our product (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015).

As Angell discusses (2014), responding to inquiries can be seen as an appropriate conduct, as Facebook is based on interactive features for socializing or dialogue, where Facebook users may expect a response. As was discussed in 4.2.2 *Interactive features*, social networking sites provides, through the feature of threaded dialogue, the opportunity of dialogue, short response times, and real-time conversations (Kent, 2010). These features give the impression of real

conversations, and enables Facebook users to expect a response, also in a short amount of time. Based on my study and collection of NetCom and Altibox's Facebook posts, I was able to find that NetCom and Altibox approximately responded to all Facebook users' inquiries in the same day that they were published on their Facebook pages. Nielsen explains that Altibox in 2014 responded to Facebook users in nine minutes and twelve seconds in average (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015). A short time response demonstrates that the companies are willing to interact, and publics might be more encouraged and willing to interact, if they know they that they can get a quick reply. Through the collected data I found that both companies often respond to inquiries within 30 minutes (see Appendix B for table showing communication tendencies). However, this is a tendency found more consistently in Altibox's communication than NetCom's.

NetCom, compared to Altibox, are unavailable for communication during 12 hours of the day, and therefore posts posted during their unavailable hours were not responded to until the morning the next day. Skjelbred explains that NetCom has an average response time of three hours on Facebook (in interview, February 20, 2015), and that this is due to the fact that they are inaccessible half the day. Also, as identified, NetCom has more followers, or "page-likes", and two additional customer service representatives available to respond to inquiries from users, compared to Altibox. However, NetCom's Facebook page contained fewer inquiries, as in comments and posts from Facebook users than Altibox (see Appendix B for table showing quantity of Facebook posts). This may be a result of having unavailable hours. While Altibox is present and accessible for communication from users everyday and at anytime, and therefore people might more often interact towards the company as they can more rapidly expect a response. On this basis, the time one is available, and short time responses, may seem important for motivating publics to interact, i.e. create engagement (Men & Tsai, 2014).

Although Altibox responded to all inquiries, there were also some exceptions in the week I studied, where Altibox did not respond until the next day, and even once where they spent up to two weeks to respond. Also, NetCom did not respond to three of the inquiries posted on their Facebook page. However, as discussed, one of my study's greatest weaknesses is that it only investigates one week, and therefore my data is characterized by tendencies occurring in that one week. If I was, for example, to investigate other weeks or other days throughout the year I might have found that these means was not exceptions, but rather prominent tendencies. Situations where the companies do not respond at all, or during the time they state they are



available, are assumingly the result of circumstances where they have a high demand and influx on their Facebook pages from Facebook users, or that posts can sometimes be lost or overlooked in the abundance of information on Facebook (Aalen, 2015; Haugseth, 2013). Here Facebook's large number of users, followers and amount of information creates challenges for NetCom and Altibox, to commit to communication. In relation to this, Facebook sets no limitations for interaction, but the communication may still be limited because it is difficult to answer all, in a short amount of time. In addition, social media's interactive features and accessibility can probably make Facebook users expect dialogue and to get a response in a short amount of time.

However, these cases were exceptions in the collected data, and on a general basis, as presented NetCom and Altibox, meet Facebook users expectations as they respond in a short amount of time, and as they pursue to respond to all initial inquiries, and have a policy to never delete any content. This demonstrates that NetCom and Altibox are aware and conscious of how to adapt to Facebook as a communication channel. This is reflected by their choice of having a group of customer service representative explicitly available to respond to inquiries through social media, and are trained and experienced in customer service communication. These representatives are probably the reason why the companies are able to commit to a short response time and real-time interaction. Dialogue requires resources to create and maintain dialogue, and to pursue feedback and inquiries (Taylor & Kent, 1998). Kent and Taylor argue that organizations that want to create dialogue online must be willing to use resources and commit to dialogue through people that are trained in this form of communication (1998).

Theunissen and Wan Noordin argue, organizations' aim should be to enable communities that participants trust to interact, which are prominent for dialogue to happen in (2012). In these environments participants should acknowledge that they have a shared responsibility to participate (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Through the collected data, I was able to identify that NetCom and Altibox presumably have achieved to establish Facebook pages where users interact with the companies in relation to their concern or issues. This is based on their Facebook pages relatively high level of activity from Facebook users (see Appendix B for table showing quantity of Facebook posts).

#### 4.4.2 Maintain Conversations

Another aspect of how NetCom and Altibox commit to conversations is how they maintain conversations with Facebook users. A prominent tendency found in the data material is that the companies maintain conversations until they perceive that there is no further need for interaction. This aspect of their communication, compared to *4.4.1 Respond to Inquiries*, concerns more the content and process of the companies' conversations with Facebook users, rather than that they on a general basis respond. As mentioned, NetCom responded to almost all of users' page posts and Altibox responded to all posts, posted on their Facebook pages during week 16. If we include all inquiries including the original post and the following conversational posts or Facebook comments of the threaded dialogue, it is clear that the companies often engage in the threaded dialogue, although quantitatively not at the same level as Facebook users (see Appendix B for table showing quantity of Facebook posts).

The quantitative differences between Facebook users and the companies' posts are based on three communication tendencies, based on my interpretation. First, Facebook users sometimes disperse their message, where they present their inquiry through more than one post. In this case the companies often respond to the user's inquiry through one post. The other tendency is when other users, than the author of the initial message, join the conversation. Kent suggests that, in social media, public relations professionals should encourage and invite competing voices and outsiders into the conversation to solve problems (Kent, 2013). These users, to my understanding, either joins the conversation by expressing a similar issue, or by presenting a solution to the author of the initial message's issue. In these cases the company usually "exits" the conversation, or at least do not further interfere with the conversation between users, hence resulting in a larger number of user-posts, than posts from the companies.

Third, the conversation usually ends when the initial problem the user had seems to be solved, as demonstrated in *Illustration 4*, resulting in more posts from users, than from the companies. Here, a customer asks if Altibox is conducting some form of work in the area the customer lives, because the customer doesn't have any TV signal. Altibox responds by stating that they have a problem and technical personnel are working on the case. The customer replies: "thank you for a quick reply" and a smiley face. In these cases, when a Facebook user to some degree demonstrates satisfaction or positivity, e.g. a smiley face, towards the information given in the response, NetCom and Altibox do not further interact with the user. To my understanding,

this communication process is one of the main tendencies in the data concerning user-approached communication. First the user approach NetCom or Altibox on Facebook, and express an issue or sentiment towards their experience with Altibox or NetCom. Then the company responds in an attempt to solve the issue. Another tendency is where the user doesn't respond at all to Altibox or NetCom's response to their inquiry. When the user's response is absent the companies do not further interact and the conversation ends.



*Illustration 4:*

- Facebook user: “Hi! Is there any work being done in \_? We don’t have any TV signal in \_.”
- Altibox: “Yes, unfortunately it is a common error with your provider at the moment. Technical personnel are working on the case. Sincerely Thordis.”
- Facebook user: “Thank you for quick response 😊”

In the collected data, I found that most often the companies’ responses contain information relevant to the Facebook user’s inquiry. This most often involves information regarding the issues or problem that user’s might be experiencing, e.g. solutions or information of how to solve the problem. Taylor and Kent argue that to create engagement, not only must the organization respond to input from publics, but also the organization must actually respond to the inquiry; the answer must actually answer the question (2014). An answer is what builds the foundation for greater interaction and trust (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Here, NetCom and Altibox provide Facebook users with valuable information for the Facebook users, as it is information the user seeks, through their responses, and thus the information is provided with a sense of credibility (Tsai & Men, 2013). This conversation is usually further continued until the user expresses a form of satisfaction, and the conversation ends. Taylor and Kent discuss that if publics are unsatisfied with the answer, they have the right to further interact until they

are satisfied with the answer (2014). The threaded dialogue lowers the threshold of response (Kent, 2010), and Facebook users can interact with the companies until they are satisfied with the answers given. Based on the collected data, and quantity of input from Facebook users, users seem to take advantage of this opportunity.

Taylor and Kent discuss through Pearson's first dimension of dialogue that to create engagement an ethical and interactive system between the organization and publics must exist before interaction can begin (2014). Here, both parties must be able to understand the system of how the interaction will begin, how it can be maintained and end, before they interact (Taylor & Kent, 2014). First, the companies offer a specific promise to help in their information texts on Facebook, as identified in *4.3.1 Offer "Help"*, where they encourage Facebook users to participate. Furthermore, based on my understanding, Facebook users commonly approach NetCom and Altibox by expressing an issue or sentiment towards their experience with the companies, i.e. when they need help. Based on this, we can assume that there exists a mutual understanding between the companies and publics regarding how the interaction begins.

A mutual understanding of how to maintain interactions is applicable to how NetCom and Altibox respond by providing relevant to the Facebook user's inquiry. Which most often involves information regarding issues or problem that user's might be experiencing, e.g. solutions or information of how to solve the problem. Through threaded dialogues Facebook users can further interact until they are satisfied with the answers given. Also, as discussed, Facebook users can rely on getting a response within the time NetCom and Altibox state they are available, and often get a response in a short amount of time. Finally, a mutual understanding of when the conversation ends is relevant to how NetCom and Altibox identify that publics should approach them to get help solving an issue; they state that conversations will be maintained until the issue or issues are solved. The conversation usually ends, to my understanding, based on the user's response, or absence of response, where the user appears as satisfied or where the company perceives that there is no further need for interaction, where the purpose of the conversation is realized.

Satisfaction, as Kang identifies as a prerequisite of engagement (2014), is based on to what degree publics are feeling positively toward the organization (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Since the conversation seems to end when the organizations interpret the customer, Facebook user or

follower as satisfied, or where there is no further need for responding, the companies' goal of the conversation can be considered to be publics' satisfaction. In addition, Facebook users can rely on getting the help they need, as NetCom and Altibox fulfill their promise to help Facebook users, which in return may enhance trust. Trust is premised on the organization doing what it says it will do (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Unfulfilled promises can decrease trust; trust is an important relational variable of engagement, and also dialogue (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai). Therefore it is important for engagement that the companies actually do what they say that they are going to do, and to fulfill the promises they make. Both Skjelbred and Nielsen refer to this in the interviews and state that the companies' goal for customer service and engagement is to create relationships based on loyalty and satisfaction with existing customers (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015; Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015). Hence, NetCom and Altibox pursue to build relationships with publics, based on satisfaction and trust, by solving users' issues or problems, to further create engagement.

Conversational commitment refers to a mutual conversation, based on collective benefits (Kent & Taylor, 2002); also, as mentioned, engagement is based on mutual beneficiaries (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Dialogue is genuine, where the organization and publics should act and communicate based on what is best for the relationship (Kent & Taylor, 2002). NetCom and Altibox appear to be committed to conversations based on mutual beneficiaries. Facebook users can benefit from approaching the companies with input, their experiences and needs, where NetCom and Altibox's customer service representatives actively respond to help users regarding what they seek. In this, the companies are perceived as committed to Facebook users input, experiences and needs. NetCom and Altibox also benefit from these conversations, as they are able to build and maintain relationships with Facebook users, based on trust and satisfaction that further creates possibilities for engagement. Solving problems for Facebook users might be favorable for NetCom and Altibox, as this is something Facebook users expects from the companies, as the companies state that this is something they will do. It may also create satisfaction and feelings of positivity towards the companies, their products or services, as Facebook users are "helped" in relation to a problem they are having.

Moreover, it may help NetCom and Altibox develop, as they can gain insight to what works, and what does not work, problems and deficiencies of or in their products and services, as Facebook users turn to the companies when they are experiencing a problem. Nielsen referred to this aspect in the interview and explained why creating engagement is important for the

company, and their Facebook page. Here he identified engaged Facebook followers are those who “cares”, and have an opinion about the company, both positive and negative, and can help the company to develop (in interview, February 26, 2015):

An essential facet of Facebook is that engaged followers can help us to develop. Engaged users are essential for us on Facebook because through communication and their participation they express their opinions publicly, and by active and sincere listening one can gain insight to key aspects for our development and improvement (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015).

On the other hand, in Taylor and Kent’s conceptualization of engagement they identify that engagement requires interaction with stakeholders/publics for relational purposes *outside* of an immediate problem/issue (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 391). To my understanding the majority of NetCom and Altibox’s responses, or interaction with publics, are based on problems or issues. In addition, the companies perceive the issue and conversation as solved and completed when the need for a solution is terminated, and withdraws from the conversation. Taylor and Kent argue that organizations “do not simply drop out or stop participating when their goals have been met” (2014: 392). Yet, it will probably be difficult for the companies to endure conversations to pursue dialogue, as this is a time consuming process. As discussed, their Facebook pages are open for anyone to participate within, and as a result contain a large amount of activity from Facebook users. To be able to respond to all, in addition to endure conversations requires resources in time and people committed to respond, short time responses and enduring conversations. In this sense, dialogic engagement is challenged in social media, as social media most commonly are open for everyone to participate within. On the other hand, dialogue involves including as many as possible in communication (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012).

As mentioned, Kent and Taylor, argue that to achieve dialogue requires resources (2002), and both NetCom and Altibox have assigned customer service representatives committed to respond to inquiries from Facebook users. These customer service representatives are trained in, or have experience with customer service communication through social media, as initially stated. Taylor and Kent explain that spokespeople and leaders must be trained in dialogic engagement so that they are prepared for the risks, challenges and opportunities created by dialogue (Taylor & Kent, 2014). However, NetCom and Altibox’s customer service representatives are trained in customer service communication, not dialogue. Their training is

based on effectively helping and solving problems through communication in relation to Facebook users experience with products and services, as demonstrated. As a result, the companies' communication at a level rather appears to be solution orientated, than dialogic.

#### ***4.5 They Use Attentive and Personal Communication***

NetCom and Altibox's final strategy for engagement is based on a tendency found in the data material where both companies use attentive and personal communication. In Taylor and Kent's attempt to conceptualize engagement they propose: "engagement requires demonstration of positive regard for stakeholders/public's input, experiences and needs" (2014: 391). Therefore, to create engagement organizations must demonstrate that publics' opinions and input are valued, and they have their best interests at mind. Here, by being attentive and personal in their communication towards Facebook users, NetCom and Altibox demonstrate that they value Facebook users input. Dialogue involves being open for input, and where organizations need to assure publics that their opinions matter (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

##### **4.5.1 Attentive Responses**

NetCom and Altibox's way of responding and style of writing has an attentive character. In this, they demonstrate that Facebook users' input is heard and valued, and that their opinions matter. As a result, the companies appear as empathetic towards their input, experiences and needs. Empathy is also a principle and a relational variable of dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002), and as discussed a prerequisite of engagement (Men & Tsai, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Therefore, to create engagement the companies must build a foundation for empathetic relationships (Kent & Taylor, 2002). It is by facilitating and encouraging publics' participation, and by actually listening to what they have to say that an organization is able to build empathetic relationships with publics through dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Therefore, in addition to facilitate and encourage Facebook users participation, NetCom and Altibox must demonstrate that Facebook users' input, experiences and needs are actually heard, and valued.

Also, as earlier discussed, an aspect of encouraging Facebook users to approach the companies in relation to customer service is that most often when someone addresses

customer service, it is usually because one has a problem, or a challenge based on experienced quality, with the companies. On this basis, frequently communicating means of attentiveness can be the result of people often expressing problems and negative experiences. Therefore these means can also be interpreted as a strategy to change Facebook users experiences and opinions to something positive, and to prevent the negative input from escalating.



Illustration 5:

- Facebook user: "Network down at Varhaug – something enduring?"
- Altibox: "Unfortunately we are having problems in this area. We apologize for this, and are working feverishly to get things up and running again. Sincerely, Øyvind."
- Facebook user: "Thanks for reply – do you consider a solution during the evening?"
- Altibox: "We do, but cannot yet guarantee it. We are working as fast as we can. Sincerely, Øyvind."

A prominent tendency, to my understanding, in both NetCom and Altibox's communication, is expressions of concern or confirmation (see Appendix B for table showing communication tendencies). Both companies typically use expressions like "we are sorry", "unfortunately", "we apologize for the inconvenience this causes you" and "I am sorry to hear that". These expressions are typically used in a response to Facebook users that approaches the companies with a problem he or she is experiencing, in relation to the companies services, products or the company as a whole. As demonstrated in *Illustration 5*, Altibox's customer service representative uses terms as "unfortunately", "we apologize for this" and "working feverishly to get things up and running", Altibox are perceived as genuinely concerned and attentive towards the Facebook users' problem. Here the companies assures the Facebook user that his



or hers concern is valid, and appear as attentive. NetCom and Altibox frequently use terms like this, and they can be identified as means that express the companies' concern for publics' needs, experiences and opinions.

Both companies most commonly state their concern or confirmation, when they are aware of the problem the Facebook user might be experiencing, as seen in *Illustration 5*, Altibox appears as aware of the problem. In situations where they are unaware of the problem, they companies often asks questions to further understand the situation. Yet, this is a tendency found more frequently in Altibox's communication, than NetCom's (see Appendix B for table showing communication tendencies). Typically, the companies do this when they need further information regarding the Facebook user's inquiry to solve the problem. Dialogue also involves commitment to interpretation and that participants must seek to understand each other (Kent & Taylor, 2002). By asking questions, the companies are perceived as attentive and empathetic, where they demonstrate that they are actively listening and value the Facebook user's inquiry by seeking to fully understand the Facebook user's situation (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Here publics can feel that their inquiry is interpreted and that the conversation is customized to their needs. Moreover, NetCom and Altibox are perceived as willing to cooperate with the Facebook user to find a mutual solution to the problem, enabling dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Through the use of questions, the companies endure the conversation, and appear as committed to dialogue. Facebook users frequently reply when they are asked these questions, and the conversations further continues, resulting in more interactions. Since Altibox, in a much higher degree, makes use of this mean (almost half of their responses included a question) this could also be the reason why they have a higher number of interactivity on their Facebook page, than NetCom. In this, questions build the foundation for greater interactions. Another tendency found in the collected data, is that both companies facilitate for Facebook users to contact the companies through the message feature on Facebook, where they refer to private conversations, through their responses. As mentioned, Facebook also allows for communication to be private. In addition to public posts, Facebook allow communication to happen through closed messages and chat. These are only available to the people invited into the conversation (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Here NetCom most often make use of this opportunity (see Appendix B for table showing communication tendencies). This could also

be a potential explanation for the difference in numbers of interactions on the companies' Facebook pages; NetCom more frequently take the conversation some place else.

Taylor and Kent discuss that the public nature of social media is problematic in relation to dialogue: "because social media are public, and dialogue usually is not, many interested parties may be unwilling to post public comments about private matters" (2014: 393). Invitations to private conversations can thus be seen as a strategy to protect private and sensitive information, where customers are offered an alternative to public disclosure, since Facebook is a public platform. Both Skjelbred and Nielsen refers to this in the interviews and say that they often encourage people to approach them through private conversations, especially in relation to subjects of sensitivity or privacy to the person (in interview, February 20, 2015; in interview, February 26, 2015). Through private messages, the companies demonstrate that they are open for input outside the Facebook's public newsfeed, and their desire to meet Facebook users in dialogue. This lowers the threshold for approaching the companies with their concerns and input, because one can communicate privately, without other Facebook users seeing it. Although Nielsen and Skjelbred explain that, they experience that most of the communication on their Facebook pages happens through public posts (in interview, February 20, 2015; in interview, February 26, 2015).



*Illustration 6:*

- *Facebook user: "Hi! I have forgotten my PIN code. I can neither receive a new password to 'my page' on SMS when phone is locked.. Help!"*
- *NetCom: "Hi \_! Send us a private message with your number and we will help you with this. Sincerely, Martin."*

As seen in *Illustration 6*, NetCom offer to help the customer, through the private conversation. Here the companies can, through private conversations, ascribe additional

information about the customer that would not be appropriate for everyone to see, and offer customized information regarding the customer's needs, based on the information given. In the collected data another tendency is where the Facebook users' inquiry contains critical or negative sentiment towards the companies, and the companies responds by referring to private conversations. Inviting Facebook users to private conversations can also be perceived as a strategy to keep the negative feedback or comments from escalating, or to "hide" matters that might have negative impact on the companies' reputation.

Taylor and Kent argue that there should exist a mutual understanding of the platform in which the communication happens within (2014). Seeing as Facebook users have chosen to approach NetCom or Altibox publicly, referring to private conversation can be interpreted as reluctance in creating dialogue through the platform of the user's choice. Referring to private conversations as a strategy to "hide" matters that might have negative impact on the companies is perceived as a reluctance in creating dialogue. To create dialogue, dialogic participants must accept and surrender to the risk that dialogue entails (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This can be perceived as a wish to steer the Facebook user away from the openness of Facebook, and to a closed forum, without truly responding and meeting the Facebook user in a dialogue. As mentioned, referrals to private conversations are a tendency found more often in NetCom's communication, than Altibox's, while Altibox more frequently asks questions. To make a comparison, it may be that for Facebook user, which approach NetCom's Facebook page, perceive NetCom as more unwilling to meet users in dialogue since they pursue to take the conversations elsewhere. While Altibox may appear as more committed to a dialogue, as they attempt to solve users' problems and ask questions to understand the situation right there, publicly in the threaded dialogue, for other Facebook users to see.

Even though both NetCom and Altibox responses contain attentive characteristics, they often use these attentive traits repeatedly, where similar sentences and responses often appear in the collected data. One reason for this may be that the companies have experienced that a particular type of response and traits creates satisfaction, and therefore continue to use similar responses. Yet, it also engenders their responses to appear as consistent, and therefore static. For example, especially NetCom used invitations to private conversations frequently, and these invitations were often formulated similarly, as in *Illustration 6*, in the collected data. Also, often Altibox used the sentence "we apologize for the inconvenience this causes you".

Consistent and static responses cannot be said to be dialogue, since dialogue involves commitment to interpretation and mutual understanding (Kent & Taylor, 2002) On the other hand, one can argue that Facebook users will be satisfied as long as they get an explanatory response, and therefore does not matter if the response is consistent with other responses.

The companies' consistent responses may be based on the desire to create effective communication and respond to all inquiries, within an expected time. As discussed, Facebook as a platform for communication is time consuming and may create challenges for the companies in relation to being able to meet Facebook users expectations and respond to all inquiries. Here the companies may use responses that are consistent with what they have responded before, to save time from creating individual and comprehensive responses. Also, by referring to private conversations they can save time from immediately finding the right response, and instead steer the user to a private conversation. On this basis, NetCom and Altibox may in some situations prioritize following through on their promises, above enduring conversations and achieving a mutual and beneficial dialogue. Here, the companies' consistent responses or referrals may be interpreted as means to save time for the companies, and still be able to, in a short amount of time, respond to all, and solve their problems to enhance trust and satisfaction. Again, this may indicate that social media, in addition to empower opportunities for dialogue, also poses challenges for how the companies create engagement, where it becomes difficult to accommodate both aspects of social media communication and dialogic engagement.

#### **4.5.2 Personal Communication and Appearance**

Despite that NetCom and Altibox sometimes use consistent responses, which may appear as static, the companies' overall communication form may appear as personal. Based on my understanding, NetCom and Altibox communicate through the use of a personal, verbal and easily understood language. Both Skjelbred and Nielsen confirm in interviews that their tone of voice is based on a conscious strategy. For example, Nielsen tells that Altibox tries to be informal and have a comradely tone of voice on Facebook, where they seek to be positive and personal (in interview, February 26, 2015). "When a representative from Altibox communicates they should seek to approach the Facebook user as they would when socially communicating with a friend" (Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015).

Men and Tsai emphasize that an important antecedent of engagement is a user's interactions with the organization's representatives (2013). In this, they argue that through frequent and continuous interactions with an organization's representative, a user might feel personally connected to this person, which is important for engagement (Men & Tsai, 2013). As discussed, NetCom's ten and Altibox's eight customer service representatives are responsible for most of the communication on NetCom and Altibox's Facebook pages (Skjelbred in interview, February 20, 2015; Nielsen in interview, February 26, 2015). Also, the companies encourage all their employees to communicate on behalf of the companies, as long as they are apparent in their communication on who they are and where they work (NetCom, 2014; Nielsen, 2014). Accordingly, employees communicating on behalf of the company on Facebook, identify whom they are when they respond to Facebook users. Their customer service representatives always sign their messages with their name, when responding to a user. They also actively present the user's name, in which they are communicating with, as demonstrated in *Illustration 7*. Here one of Altibox's customers has approached Altibox with a problem concerning some TV channels. Altibox's customer service representative, Randi, responds by greeting the customer and addresses the customer's name, and signs the message with her name at the bottom of the message: "With kind regards, Randi". As a result, this gives the communication a personal form, where the communication participants are recognized as individuals.



*Illustration 7:*

- Facebook user: "BBC Brit, Earth, Discovery science is dark. In Trondheim."
- Altibox: "Hi [redacted]. It is a known error for all our Altibox customers that BBC Brit, Earth and Discovery Science has black channel. Technical personnel at our supplier are working on the case. Thank you for your feedback 😊 Sincerely Randi"

NetCom also gives a short presentation and description of customer service representatives who communicate on behalf of the company on their Facebook page. For example, in the text presenting customer service representative, Mariann Larsen, a short presentation of who she is given. First, the text states how old she is and how long she has worked in NetCom. The text is personal and further gives descriptions like “she is strongly fascinated of ancient history and myths, loves to fish, fan of science fiction, horror, villages and Converse” and “if you talk with Mariann you will have pretty strong chance of receiving a smiley or two”. NetCom’s presentation of their customer service representatives can be seen as an attempt to personalize their communication. Altibox, on the other hand, does not give a presentation of their customer service representatives on Facebook.

The use of personal and verbal communication can be seen as a strategy to create closeness and lower the threshold between the companies and Facebook users. A verbal language, using names in the responses, and identifying who communicates on behalf of the company, the representatives from the companies appear as equal to and “one of us”. The Facebook user and the company’s representative are identified as equals, having shared values as individuals. That the companies appear as persons and try to present themselves as equal interlocutors provide a sense of mutual equality. This opens up opportunities for dialogue in the form of mutual exchange (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Also, Taylor and Kent argue that engaging in dialogue involves that publics must be treated as a valuable human being, and not as assets (2014; Kent & Taylor, 2002). Through the use of personal and verbal communication, NetCom and Altibox can be perceived as individuals, rather than a formal corporate categorically giant, in their communication on Facebook. Here, it is not the company that tries to solve the problem for the Facebook user, but a person.

An advantage of their personal communication form may be that users associate a sense of credibility to the companies’ representatives, and can create trust towards the companies (Men & Tsai, 2013). NetCom and Altibox virtually create relationships between their representatives and publics, which can increase trustworthiness, and create positive relations towards the companies as a whole. Their communication form is also especially relevant to online communication, as communication through the public Internet can create a distance between users. In dialogue direct, face-to-face and human communication is rather the ideal (Kent & Taylor, 2002). However, Kent explains how social networking sites have the potential to create a sense of intimacy or closeness in social media (2010). Through social

networking sites, as Facebook, one can build relationships based on feelings of cohesion between the users (Kent, 2010). The impression of closeness and equality will probably lower the barrier for involvement from Facebook users.

In addition, in *Illustration 7*, the customer service representative uses a smiley face. Both companies use smileys in their communication on Facebook. Through the use of smiley faces the companies' communication appear as positive. Kang argue that a characteristic of engagement is positive affectivity (2014). Positive affectivity is the inclination of feeling positive, or "happy" about circumstances and consequences, and to signify positivity in responses to conflicting situations (Customer Service Psychology, 2011). A positive communication form can therefore be seen as a strategy to create positivity. Communication with publics on Facebook is also limited to happen through written exchanges. As a result, Facebook users might easily misinterpret the intent of the companies' communication. The use of a smiley, or positive communication can therefore be interpreted as the companies' intent to decrease the possibility of misinterpretation.

However, the use of smileys is not an equally prominent characteristic compared to other communication tendencies in their responses found in the data material, as for example attentiveness (see Appendix B for table showing communication tendencies). On the other hand, NetCom and Altibox frequently use smiley faces in their status updates, as illustrated in *4.3.2 Convey Appealing Information*, where a smiley was used in every illustrated post. The frequent use of smileys in their status updates can be interpreted as a substitute for personal communication, through communication that is meant for everyone. The status-update feature operates as a "shout-out" to everyone who is connected to a Facebook page. Also, the companies do not sign the messages with the author of the message's name in their status updates. The use of positive means in this form of communication can be interpreted as a strategy to lower the threshold for interacting with the companies, where the companies appear as welcoming. In addition, it can be understood as a mean to create positivity towards what they are communicating, and further engage Facebook users to interact in relation to the message. Skjelbred says that on Facebook, NetCom wishes to be positive, spread good vibes and positivity towards their activities (in interview, February 20, 2015).

The informal and verbal language that NetCom and Altibox use can be interpreted as form of integration to Facebook, or social media, as communication channel. Facebook is a platform

built for social interaction with friends of one's network (boyd & Ellison, 2007). As Men and Tsai discuss, because social networking sites are communal and social, organizations' representatives often act as users' friends to integrate themselves into users' social networks (Men & Tsai, 2013). The socialness of social media probably contributes to companies' informal and personal communication, as they are communicating in a network where people normally socialize with friends. As Skjelbred explains: "NetCom communicates through a desire of being a part of Facebook follower's social circle. Therefore we try to level with the Facebook users based on their communication form and tone of voice" (February 20, 2015). Angell also found an extensive use of personal, positive, verbal and informal appearance in her study of organizations' communication on Facebook (2014), and discussed this as a form of organizational integration to social media. Meanwhile she also discussed that the casual tone of social media means that users are not concerned with expressing themselves correctly and respectful (Angell, 2014). As a result, it may be easier for users to express both disapproval and criticism directly to the companies. Hence, one could argue that the informal and fragmented spelling in social media also leads to a deterioration of language (Angell, 2014).



## 5 Conclusion

The aim for this thesis was to contribute with research on engagement, where I have chosen to focus on social media, to investigate how NetCom and Altibox create it through communication with publics. I have conducted an analysis of NetCom and Altibox's communication on Facebook, and interviewed representatives responsible for social media in the companies. My study is further based on initial research and theory of engagement and communication in social media. In addition, dialogue theory and research has been used as framework for engagement and social media communication. As presented, Taylor and Kent recently proposed that engagement is a feature of dialogue (2014). Also, dialogue theory has been a major focus in research concerning social media communication, where dialogue is considered a prominent approach to foster relationships in the new media landscape (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Kent, 2010, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Taylor, et al., 2001). The analysis presented in the previous chapter argues that NetCom and Altibox use four strategies to create engagement with publics on Facebook. In this chapter I will present a summary of my findings, methodological and theoretical reflections, and possibilities for further research.

### 5.1 Summary of Findings

The four strategies presented in the analysis have been prominent tendencies of NetCom and Altibox's communication, based on how they create engagement, found in the thesis' data material. As presented, NetCom and Altibox rely on two-way communication to build relationships in social media (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ihlen, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Engagement can be identified as what motives publics to interact, dedicate and commit to communication, participation, and the organizations. Therefore, for NetCom and Altibox to tap social media's potential for relationship building, they rely on creating engagement with publics to foster a community or environment where participants' genuine participation is encouraged and facilitated (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012).

The first strategy presented, relates to the medium's infrastructure, where social media is described to involve opportunities for dialogue. Through Kent and Taylor (2002), it was argued that by using Facebook as a channel for communication NetCom and Altibox facilitate interaction, and further dialogue and engagement with publics. First, social media is described

as entirely open (Kent, 2010), and Facebook pages are public (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Gershon, 2013). As a result, anyone who feeling affiliated towards the companies can join, interact and gain insight to the companies' activities and communication, where the companies are perceived as open and trustworthy. In addition, Facebook entails characteristics that enable the possibility of interactions. Threaded dialogue, real-time interaction and short response times create an impression of dialogue (Kent, 2010), and thus opportunities for engagement. Through the openness of their Facebook pages, and Facebook's interactive features the companies are perceived as accessible and present for anyone who feels affiliated towards the companies, and their interaction, and can be interpreted as their desire to meet publics in dialogue and create engagement.

The companies' second strategy for engagement, a prominent tendency found in the data, is the companies' aspiration for participation. NetCom and Altibox' social media strategy and guidelines showed that the companies have a deliberate strategy to encourage participation and interaction in social media (NetCom, 2014; Nielsen, 2014). In a perspective based on Taylor and Kent, it is discussed that the companies rely on Facebook users' participation and interaction in order to create engagement and dialogue. NetCom and Altibox's aspiration for participation emerges through two different forms of communication. First, the companies offer a specific kind of help, through the information texts presented on their Facebook pages. Here, the companies demonstrate that they desire Facebook users' participation in terms of customer service inquiries, which often involve customer's participation in situations when they need help to solve a problem, or experiencing a challenge based on perceived quality, of the companies' products or services. This can probably motivate users to participate with the companies, as they appear benevolent to help. Hence, my findings are not consistent with other studies that show that companies often use social media as a pure marketing channel for exploitation (Kent, 2013).

Second, NetCom and Altibox use Facebook to post appealing and useful information for Facebook users. Here they try to attract and engage users to participate and create involvement, in relation to the information they convey. Through Kent and Taylor (2002), it is argued that useful and valuable information is important to establish a foundation for dialogue (2002). To achieve engagement the companies rely on creating content that motivate users to respond and a two-way exchange of the information they provide. Based on Facebook's interactive features, users' ability to provide feedback is present. Presumably, it also creates a

form of affiliation, and further engagement, when users can participate and their behavior can have an impact on the discussion and the outcome. In addition, Facebook provides challenges in the form of an abundance of information, where the companies rely on competing with the tangle of friends' status updates, posts, pictures and videos, and information from other brands that the user might be connected to (Aalen, 2015; Haugseth, 2013). In this, it is probably beneficial for the companies to communicate appealing and useful information, in order to appear as attractive in competition with the abundance of information, to retain Facebook users' attention, to generate interest, and further create engagement.

NetCom and Altibox's commitment to conversations is presented as strategy number three. The companies demonstrate commitment to conversation through their efforts to respond to inquiries and maintain conversations. It is argued that this can be interpreted as a commitment to the participation that the companies encourage, and where dialogue involves commitment to conversations (Kent & Taylor, 2002). NetCom and Altibox do not only pursue to respond to inquiries, but appears to respond to almost all inquiries, within a stipulated time. This is interpreted as integration to Facebook as a platform, where users possibly expect to get answers within a relatively short time. In addition, the companies fulfill their promise to help Facebook users, presented in their information texts on Facebook. Here, they commit to conversations by answering inquiries in an attempt to solve the problems users might be experiencing. Further, they maintain the conversation until they perceive that the user does not have a need for further interaction. On this basis, and through Taylor and Kent (2014), it was argued that there exists a mutual understanding and interactive system of how interactions begin, are maintained and ended, before interactions take place. Overall, NetCom and Altibox's commitment to conversations likely create engagement, through trust and satisfaction (Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2014), as the companies meet the expectations and promises that they give to Facebook users.

The final and fourth strategy that I have found is attentive and personal communication. NetCom and Altibox's communication is characterized by an extensive use of attentive, personal and verbal expressions. Through Kent and Taylor (2002), I argue that attentive expressions gives the impression that companies are listening, are empathetic and value Facebook users' input. This can also be explained based on that NetCom and Altibox use Facebook as a channel for customer service, where customer service related inquiries most often involves communicating problems and negative experiences they have had with the

company. Thus, this can also be interpreted as a strategy to change users' negative experiences and opinions into something positive, and to prevent negative feedback from escalating. The personal and verbal parlance is reflected in NetCom and Altibox use of means such as the use of names in answers to inquiries and smileys in status updates. In addition, these means create a positive appearance and give the impression of equality between the companies and Facebook users. The strategy of attentiveness and personal communication is likely to be inspired and characterized by dialogic principles (Kent & Taylor, 2002), and characteristics of social media. Attentive and personal communication may decrease the barrier to interact with the company, and thus forms a basis for dialogue, engagement and further relationships. Through these means, the companies give of themselves and show that they care about their users, which probably engages and motivates Facebook users to interact.

The companies in my selection appear to have managed to adapt to social media successfully. Both companies that I have analyzed directly encourage and use social media as a channel for customer service. In this, they seemingly make use of the dialogic features that social media provide and integrate their communication to fit social media's dialogic and social format, and have chosen a clear purpose and goal for their presence. Based on the strategies outlined, the companies build engagement by being present and accessible, by demonstrating openness, willingness, empathy and equivalence. Through these factors, they establish a foundation for trust, empathy and satisfaction, based on dialogue. Taylor and Kent emphasize, creating dialogic engagement involves something more than posting posts and responding to inquiries in social media: "[...] dialogue is only possible when people spend time together interacting, understanding the rules of interaction, trusting the other person/people involved in interaction, etc." (2014: 390). Therefore, drawing on Taylor and Kent (2014) it appears that it is through a combination of Facebook's dialogic features and customer service communication, that the companies are able to create dialogic engagement. Through customer service communication on Facebook, the representatives from the companies and publics come together and publicly discuss their experiences, the company, its services or products. Here the companies appear to be willing to reach a mutual beneficial position, and cooperate with publics towards change, for the good of the community (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Nevertheless, there were also found aspects of NetCom and Altibox's communication, which was argued not to fulfill Taylor and Kent's conceptualization of engagement (2014). The companies' communication appears rather to be goal or solution oriented, than dialogic. First,

the appealing and useful information the companies provide users with, is discussed to be strategically motivated by profit, which was also confirmed by Skjelbred interview (February 20, 2015). Second, the companies withdraw from conversations once they interpret that the need for a solution is terminated. Through a dialogic perspective, the conversation itself is a goal (Kent & Taylor, 2002). On this basis, NetCom and Altibox would create a much more prominent dialogue and strengthen the opportunity of dialogic engagement, by enduring the conversation. Here, they should communicate to detect that publics' desire no further interactions and maintain the conversation until both parties are satisfied. Instead, the companies seem committed to the user's issue or problem itself, instead of the conversation. Third, the companies' responses sometimes appear as consistent with other responses, and the companies appear as static in their communication. This might be perceived as reluctance in creating dialogue, and further be obstructive for engagement to happen.

The latter aspect of the companies' communication appears to be result of challenges posed by the companies' own goals and tenets provided by social media communication. One on hand, the companies are provided with the platform's possibilities for dialogue and relationship building, but on the other, they assumingly have a desire to act strategically to protect their reputation, and make profit. In addition, both social media communication and dialogue are time-consuming processes. Social media assumingly creates expectations in terms of communication based on short response time and real time interactions. In light of this, it might be difficult for the companies to respond to all in a short amount of time, endure conversations and constantly create individual and comprehensive answers, all at the same time. As a result, it appears difficult to accommodate both aspects of social media communication and dialogue.

Overall, NetCom and Altibox do not fully fulfill the concept of dialogic engagement as Taylor and Kent conceptualizes it (2014). On the other hand, the companies seem to have established Facebook pages as communities where publics at a high level interact with the companies. In addition, the companies are acknowledged for their use of social media. Hence, one cannot exclude that they create engagement. Theunissen and Wan Noordin state that dialogue, as a theoretical approach, is highly philosophical and abstract in nature, and even to some extent impossible to achieve as a public relations based approach (2012). They argue that dialogue should rather be seen as an ideal to strive after, rather than an operationalizable or step-to-step approach for public relations (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Based on this, I argue the

need for a descriptive approach to engagement, in addition to the normative characterized dialogic approach, to understand engagement as a concept.

## ***5.2 Theoretical and Methodological Reflections***

In this section, I will discuss the thesis' weaknesses and reflect on what could have been done differently. On this basis, I will discuss and summarize the methods and theoretical perspectives that I have chosen and was presented in chapter two and three. First of all, this thesis is based on a qualitative case study with a holistic multiple-design. I have approached the data material descriptively and analytically to understand and interpret the narratives of engagement created by NetCom and Altibox in social media. Additionally, I have presented and discussed theoretical perspectives of engagement, dialogue and social media. As discussed in chapter three, I have had to refine and limit my data collection based on time and quantity because of the thesis' scale and scope. Because of these limitations, and that my thesis is based on a qualitative approach, my study is restricted from drawing clear conclusions and generalize findings to a larger population. It is also possible that I, as the researcher, have influenced the outcome of the analysis, as qualitative research is characterized by subjectivity.

The case study conducted has been limited to investigate two organizations, that both provides telecommunication services, and thus provides little basis for saying anything about other organizations' circumstances and presence in social media. In addition, this thesis merely focuses on Facebook, and can therefore not draw any conclusions of circumstances or situations in other social media platforms. Moreover, I conducted two interviews with one representative from each company, responsible for social media. Here, with advantage, I could have included additional interview subjects in the data material. For example, I could have conducted interviews with the companies' customer service representatives, who actively communicate on a daily basis on behalf of the company. This would have helped me gain a more diverse insight to how the organizations' communicate in practice, rather than merely interviewing people who at a superior and general level are strategically responsible for the companies' social media communication.

Also, the selection of data is limited to concern one week, and might be one my study's greatest weaknesses, as my research question seeks to understand how NetCom and Altibox

create engagement in general. The fact that one continuous week from each company alone is the basis for the sample, is a limiting factor in terms of what the thesis covers and can answer. For example, occurrences and irregularities in that one week will have a great impact on the collected data. Because of this it is possible that I have missed important tendencies that could have helped to answer the research question and gain an increased in-depth understanding of the phenomena investigated. On this basis, irregularities in the material may have a greater impact and outcome of my analysis and reflections. Even though one cannot generalize from qualitative research, as discussed in chapter three, I have also used a systematic approach to my analysis. By categorizing the organization's communication tendencies, it has been amendable to identify dominating communication strategies.

However, the categories cannot be said to be mutually exclusive (Østbye et al., 2007). The categories sometimes overlap, and as a result, I experienced some difficulties during the analysis process. For example, I encountered that, while I was discussing tendencies of one of the companies' strategies, that other tendencies or means placed in another strategy could also have been relevant for that strategy. In addition, I can neither exclude that there are additional strategies or tendencies that I have not been able to identify. There are also an amount of Facebook posts or comments that are not covered by the strategies I presented as the basis for my findings and analysis in chapter 4. This has been input that it is not in relevance to engagement, and which therefore has not been adequate in relation to the theory of engagement and dialogue, and thus focus of the thesis. The risk of having missed tendencies in the data, and the problems in identifying strategies or tendencies that are appropriate for the remaining data may be a result of the limitations in the quantity of data and time. A broader and larger data may have resulted in additional tendencies and strategies of how the organizations create engagement. The extent of my research and the usefulness of the thesis can therefore be said to be limited based on my selections of data and methods.

Yet, to further strengthen the thesis' validity I have taken screenshots of the data material, and retained and saved the screenshots to ensure verifiability. In addition, I have chosen to use engagement and dialogue as theoretical perspectives and concepts as a framework for my analysis, and explained my understanding of these. On the other hand, theory concerning engagement in the field of public relations is either very new, insufficient in its conceptualization, or completely absent (Johnston, 2014; Kang, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). As presented, Taylor and Kent recently proposed engagement and

dialogue as interdependent concepts (2014). On this basis, I have been able to rely on dialogue theory as a framework for engagement and to gain an understanding of how the companies create it. Dialogue is an established theoretical perspective in public relations, and is claimed to be a prominent approach for building and maintaining relationships (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ihlen, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Taylor, et al., 2001; Taylor & Kent, 2014; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). In addition, theoretical contributions addressing the Internet and social media, and the platforms' potential for dialogue and relationship building (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kent, 2010, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor, et al., 2001; Waters, et al., 2009), have been useful in the analysis in relation to how NetCom and Altibox create engagement in social media, and the platforms' potential for engagement.

I chose to follow Taylor and Kent's proposal of a dialogic approach to engagement (2014), as this is, to my knowledge one of the few theoretical contributions to how organizations can create engagement. Therefore, dialogue theory has been used as one of the main theoretical perspectives in my thesis. Since very little research has been conducted in relation to engagement, it is not certain that dialogue is the most prominent approach to engagement. For example, I could have benefited from supplementing by research with established rhetorical theories and concepts to further gain an understanding of how organizations use rhetorical means to create engagement. Another facet is that the different aspects I discuss cannot be said with certainty to truly engage publics. Because of the lacking research there exists very little literature on what actually makes publics feel engaged, through a public relations perspective. Here, it could be advantageous to focus on the recipients or audience to examine how they perceive the communication.

Nevertheless, the main aim of this thesis is not to explain the effect of engagement, or to provide a recipe for how to successfully create engagement. The aim is rather to contribute to insight and an understanding of engagement as a concept, and give a broad description of characteristics of how NetCom and Altibox's attempts to create engagement through communication. In relation to this, the qualitative approach is the most advantageous, as it is based on a subjective dimension, and it provides another type of insight. The basis for this study is not to achieve generalizable tendencies, but to contribute with further research on a concept that so far has been lacking a clear definition and conceptualization, and is perceived as ambiguous in its meaning, in the field of public relations.



### ***5.3 Possibilities for Further Research***

This thesis demonstrates that there is need for more and further research concerning engagement. The methodological and theoretical weaknesses of my research, that I have presented, can be the basis for further research. First of all, it would be interesting to see if engagement and how one creates it depends or differs based on the platform one is communicating through, and how organizations adapt to these. Here, other platforms in social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, etc., and other communication channels in general, contain potential for further research of engagement. For example, Skjelbred stated that he believed Instagram to be a much more prominent platform for engagement (in interview, February 20, 2015). Also, Facebook is in constant change, and some speculate towards the platform's future popularity. It can therefore be interesting to investigate Facebook's further development and how the platform adapts to the future, and how this will influence engagement.

This thesis is based on a case study that involves two companies belonging to the same industry. Therefore it would, for example, also be interesting to conduct comparative research investigating engagement based on organizations belonging to different industries. In this, it would be applicable to ask if the industry the organization belongs to provide prerequisites for how to create engagement, and what these prerequisites are. Another opportunity for further research is a reception perspective of engagement. One could, for example, investigate to what degree recipients actually experience engagement towards the companies' communication. Here, one could conduct qualitative interviews or quantitative surveys to measure how publics or stakeholders perceive organization's communication in relation to engagement. As this thesis' selection of data is limited, any quantitative analysis or larger qualitative study of engagement may be a useful contribution to the research. Since engagement is in need of further research, the possibilities are many. In this context, I would like to particularly emphasize the need for research on engagement through different perspectives. Researchers should adapt, test, investigate, and examine how to create engagement, what it is, and why one should create it through additional perspectives to public relations.

A suggestion could be to investigate engagement through rhetoric. Rhetorical theory can be used to understand how organizations try to establish frames of interpretation that are important to them and also to gain insight into what publics are saying, through words and expressions, about the organization (Ihlen, 2010). Through rhetoric one can conduct and gain dialogue, while it can also be used to evaluate textual strategies, or to critically challenge messages in society. Organizations try to influence publics in a manner that has positive results for the organization and to do this the organization uses rhetoric. “The process by which organizations influence and are influenced by others involves persuasion” (Ihlen, 2010: 64). Based on this, rhetoric can be seen as central to engagement in public relations because when organizations try to engage, it can be interpreted as a process of or intent to influence the receiver in a way that benefits the organization. Another potential perspective could be organization-public relationships. Organization-public relationships are seen as an outcome of effective public relations. Broom, Casey and Richey define organization-public relationships as “the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange and linkage between an organization and its publics” (2000: 18). Through a perspective of managing relationships engagement could be evaluated based on what affect it has on the relationship between the organization and its publics. Other suggestions are crisis management or corporate reputation; as mentioned, the possibilities are many in the so far unexplored field of public relations and engagement.

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# Appendix A

## Interview Guide

Date:

Company:

Informant's name:

Informant's position:

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1. How do you define engagement?
  - a. What do you define and perceive as users' engagement on Facebook?
    - Specific behavior/interaction/feelings?
    - Can you describe a typical engaged user?
  - b. In what situations do you experience that users' engagement occur?
    - Appealing content/interaction/communication/dialogue
    - Through time? Is it based on a process or does it happen through first time contact?
2. What relational factors do you perceive as foundational for achieving engagement?
  - a. What variables do you experience affect engagement?
    - How?
    - How do you think an engaged user experiences the company?
    - What type of relationship or communication do you experience that an engaged user has with the company? (long-term, positive impression, first time contact)
3. How do you experience Facebook as a channel for engagement?
  - a. What potential does Facebook's features have for engagement?
  - b. Is engagement on Facebook transmissible to other channels?

4. How do you create engagement?
  - a. What do you experience creates engagement on Facebook?
    - What measures/actions/means?
    - How does the company relate to users to create engagement?
    - Specific expressions?
  - b. How do you communicate to create engagement?
    - Tone of voice: professional, personal, positive, etc.?
    - Response rate?
    - Situations where the company does not respond?
    - Response to negative feedback?
    - Sensitive subjects?
    - Invitations to private conversations?
  - c. Do you have a strategy or guidelines for engagement?
    - Optionally, is engagement included in the company's overall communication strategy/guidelines?
    - Long-term plan/planned communication or spontaneous communication?
  - d. Do you attempt to maintain engagement with publics?
    - Maintenance of engagement or engagement as situational?
    - Persistence of conversations?
    - How?
  - e. Who communicates on behalf of the company on Facebook?
    - How many?
    - To what time?
    - Consistent communication: One clear voice? Communicate a common identity?
    - How? Trained?
    - Impact on engagement?

5. Why do you attempt to create engagement on Facebook?
  - a. Why do you wish to create engagement on Facebook?
    - What is your goal for creating engagement?
    - Long-term goal or as a solution on a specific situation?
    - How important is engagement to you?
    - What do you feel you can achieve with engaged Facebook users?
    - Do you feel that engagement contributes to achieve your overall goals?
    - In that case, what goals and how?
  
6. What challenges do you face with engagement on Facebook?
  - Biggest challenge?
  - How do you choose to manage these challenges?
  - Future plans or changes?
  
7. Is there anything you want to improve with how you create engagement on Facebook?
  - How?
  - Why?
  
8. Do you have anything more you want to add?

# Appendix B

## B-1. Quantity of Facebook Posts from Companies and Users

Facebook Posts	Netcom	Altibox
Status Updates from Companies	10	4
Page posts from users*	115	163
Responses from companies**	112	163
<b>Companies' response rate</b>	<b>97 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>
Total amount of posts from users***	217	492
Total amount of responses from companies****	188	327
<b>Companies' participation rate</b>	<b>87 %</b>	<b>66 %</b>

\*Concerns the initial post of the threaded dialogue

\*\*Concerns the companies' responses to users' initial posts of the threaded dialogue

\*\*\*Include all posts from users in the threaded dialogues

\*\*\*\* Include all of the companies' responses in the threaded dialogues

**B-2. Strategies for Engagement based on Communication Tendencies**

Strategies	Tendencies	Netcom	Altibox
<b>Facilitate Interaction</b>			
	Use Facebook as communication channel	✓	✓
	Anyone can publish to the Page	✓	✓
<b>Aspire for Participation</b>			
	State that they are available to "help" users	✓	✓
	State when they are available	✓	X
	Convey appealing and Useful information*	10	4
	Asks questions*	1	3
	Use pictures/videos*	10	4
<b>Commit to Conversations</b>			
	Responds to inquiries**	188	327
	Responds within 30 minutes**	76	293
	Maintain conversations**	✓	✓
<b>Use Attentive and Personal Communication</b>			
	Assurances and expressions of concern**	62	72
	Asks questions**	22	149
	Invitations to private conversations**	42	25
	Positive communication/use of smileys**	14	36
	Personal communication**	✓	✓
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* Tendencies found in the companies' status updates

\*\* Tendencies found in the companies' responses to users