DIFFUSION OF SOCIAL MEDIA
An empirical study of user groups and adoption

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ABSTRACT

By examining how diffusion of social media differs from the process as presented by Rogers’ (2003), the following research question is posited; how does social media diffuse? The thesis takes an empirical approach, with results founded upon both quantitative and qualitative data, gathered through 128 questionnaires, 13 interviews and six case studies. The data is collected from an international, broad sample of social media users and companies, and is coded and analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A user typology is developed, resulting in five social media user groups. These groups act as the infrastructure that founds the discussion of the following subjects; the innovation decision-process; adoption and rejection; networks; user-generated content; user activity and the bell-curve. Combined with supportive literature addressing subjects, including service management (Normann, 2010), diffusion of information technology (Moore, 2000) and networks (Burt, 1992), the findings are extensively discussed and applied in the context of social media. The study puts forth that the social media decision process includes a stage of ‘trial’, and that the process of adoption occurs within a community, rather than as an action carried out by an individual. It is further deduced that the five user groups do not join or adopt social media in a sequential manner, due to several barriers and a chasm, that disrupt it from doing so. As such, it is suggested that creators of social media approach users based on communities of interest or demographic, defined as ‘communities of commonality’, rather than on the basis of their technical adeptness. Lastly, a series of potential areas for further research are suggested, including the exploration of social media platform types; varying behaviours and relationships; and the dynamics of the communities of commonality.
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1.1 MOTIVATION

Younger generations are plagued by an often unhealthy propensity for, and reliance on social media, gaining recognition by scholars as a modern epidemic (Dretzin & Maggio, 2008; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009); from firsthand experience we have been affected in our lives and relationships both on and offline, as the age of digital culture is upon us. Subsequently, our own use has motivated a great faith and interest in the value social media can deliver, by uniting people across distant boundaries under an infinitum of pretenses; be it an interest, demographic, ailment, or even for the sake of disaster relief.

That said, we have also come to acknowledge, that the influx of social media has also resulted in significant failure. As researchers and authors of this thesis, we have a strong appreciation for the aesthetics, functionality, novelty and design of digital products. Further, a great curiosity for how users come to commit to use of particular products over others, and why particular platforms have become so widely adopted whilst often higher quality contenders cannot compete, has generated extensive questioning and uncertainty. We thus wish to explore the challenges faced by the creators of social media, when encouraging adoption and tackling a marketplace where selection and variety is ample, and users are driven by wants rather than needs.

To approach this, we will first provide the reader with a brief evaluation of the social media industry, followed by a review of prominent contributions to innovation diffusion theory that continue to serve as resources, to understand how products come to be adopted. In doing so, we strive to identify discrepancies in the current body of literature,
and ultimately determine how our research can provide value both for other academics, and for social media industry players.

1.2 EXPLORING THE FIELDS OF INTEREST

1.2.1 Social media
As a fairly recent phenomenon, characterized by “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” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61), social media has swept up consumers of popular culture across the globe, having grown to now entertain 1.5 billion users in just a few years (Chiu et al., 2012). Scholars Boyd & Ellison (2007, p. 7) consider the phenomenon as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. However, as the industry develops, the degree of social connectedness delivered through digital media, sets products apart in the ever-growing marketplace of new online product. Given the rapid evolution of user demands and preferences, as well as the diversity of consumers of social media, creators of such products must constantly iterate their medium to appease such lofty needs.

The advent of real-time social media services date back to 1997, when Sixdegrees.com, a service that enabled users to create profiles and list friends, as well as blogs and online messaging services were made available to anyone with internet access (Digital Trends, 2012). In 2002, the market exploded with social network services such as Friendster, LinkedIn and MySpace, however it was not until 2004 with the launch of Facebook, that social media became a widely accepted concept. Social media now serves as the primary activity online and users are becoming increasingly diverse; supporting evidence includes the surprising fact that one in four American internet users over 65 now own a social media profile (Norman, 2010).

Having “changed the nature of online user participation into more democratising forums
where people can communicate and add their user-generated content [...] more active use indicates more varied use and forms of participation” (Brandtzæg, 2011, p. 29). Social media further distinguishes itself from traditional media, as it is inexpensive and easily accessible while enabling individuals to both publish and consume information. Consequently, social media has been classified as one of the most powerful sources for news, trends and marketing, especially as favored platforms such as Facebook and Twitter increase in popularity, both for individuals and companies alike. Through its interactive nature, this media channel has been a revolution not only for the communications of organisations, communities, and individuals, but has also grown an entirely new commercial marketplace.

With the success of Facebook in particular, reporting 1 billion active users in October 2012, who average seven hours of use per month (Facebook, 2012), the market has seen a dramatic rise in new social media products. Low entry barriers for both adopters and producers has encouraged growth in contenders, many of whom aspire to be ‘the next Facebook’. Businesses including large enterprises are also quickly incorporating technologies, that mimic the real time dialogue enabled by online social networks to improve collaboration and productivity (Chiu et al., 2012). However, with the influx of new players and rapid industry growth, high failure rates in the market of social media products has ensued as developers struggle to move forward from the initial hype into mainstream, and long-term successful markets (Helft, 2012).

Following its success, social media has gained significant attention from practitioners, resulting in an influx of ‘how-to’ literature (Sterne, 2010; Safko & Brake, 2009; Agresta & Bough, 2011), however there is a lack of empirical research on the topic. Furthermore, current research appears to be highly focused on the demographics of users, the superficials of their behaviour and even more so, how organisations can exploit the media from a marketing standpoint. Despite the huge interest in social media, academic research is lacking and does not provide a fully detailed understanding of the phenomena (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Current literature is often rigid, becoming quickly outdated and does not appreciate the innovative and composite nature of the social media market and its contributors - commonly from failure to incorporate adequate empirical foundations. The lack of sufficient inquiry to postulate a logical and thorough understanding of the
users who drive a medium through their activity and commitment, has resulted in both creators of social media and academics to resign to the nobody-knows principle (Caves, 2000). This screams for further research, to better understand and positively impact the users of a medium, both for the organisations using the platforms and the companies who create them.

1.2.2 Diffusion

Diffusion theory seeks to explain how, why and at what rate new ideas and in particular technologies, spread through a social system. The founding theories of innovation literature, which are consistently used to nurture current innovations, are founded on the basis of a diffusion process encompassing the following: “two types of actors, an advocate of change and a potential acceptor of change; the situations in which these actors operate; communication between the actors; and the subject of that communication, a new thing or idea” (Fliegel & Kivlin, 1966).

Many classification systems have attempted to achieve standardisation of adopter categories, however those defined by Rogers (2003) half a century ago, still persist as a dominant resource for understanding users, even in regards to new innovations today. Applied in rural sociology, Rogers (2003) argues that innovations are diffused through various channels over time (p. 11), amongst members of a social system who are categorised within five distinct groups: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (p. 22). This theory is recognised, tested on, adapted for and applied to many other industries beyond those used in its origination.

While Rogers’ (2003) theory creates a broad foundation for how innovations spread through a social system, Bass (1969) attempts to predict adoption based on the interaction between existing and potential users of a product; using consumer durables he mathematically forecasts new users of a product over a duration of time. Further, theorist von Hippel (1986) asserts that certain technologies allow the end user to participate in the production of the innovation. In particular he develops the concept of ‘the lead user’, who can create important feedback to producers and lead other user groups to adopt a product. Moore (2000) adds to the body of knowledge, by addressing the diffusion of high-technology products. He states the existence of a ‘chasm’ that must be overcome
through marketing efforts that allows the product to diffuse through user groups similar to those proposed by Rogers (2003).

Based on the above summary of existing knowledge, we thus assert a gap in the body of research, that focuses on the diffusion of online products.

1.2.3 Gaps in existing theory

As Rogers (2003) delimits his theory using agricultural technologies, we regard the fundamental differences between the products used in Rogers’ theory and those of social media, as the root of incompatibility in predicting the diffusion of social media. The social media market demands a theory that accounts for the vast differences between its respective products and the ‘infrequently purchased’ tangible goods, that founded traditional diffusion theory (Bass, 2004, p. 182). By nature, adoption barriers for social media are low and lasting relationships between its users are essential for long-term success; thus the innate differences between the products referred to in original diffusion literature and those of social media presents an ineptitude.

Recent attempts to apply diffusion theory to social media have materialised, with a focus on generating a user typology for online social products (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011; Ortega, Menendez, Gonzales, 2007; Horrigan, 2007; Li et al., 2007; Roberts & Foehr, 2004). Such attempts have yet to deliver a thorough understanding that lends generalisations that can be applied to all social media often due their narrow scope.

Whilst Brandtzæg and Heim (2011) provide relatively new research in the field, their results have been gathered only on the basis of Norwegian subjects’ use of four local social networks, with samples averaging a median age of 16 years. This study thus fails to capture a fair representation of the complex diversity of social media users. A similar approach by Roberts & Foehr (2004) identifies six user groups, using a sample of American youth between eight and eighteen years of age, again failing to depict the broad demographics of social media users. In comparison, the study carried out by Li et al. (2007) has succeeded in using an approach that encompasses a broad sample base, but lacks a theoretical foundation and identifies only highly superficial qualities within its six user groups. Kozinets (1999) studies the consumption activity and the intensity of
relationships, between members of a virtual community; identifying four user groups. However, this classification relies only on levels of interaction between users, dismissing their motivations for use and factors that influence adoption. Furthermore, Kozinets’ (1999) theory is based only on findings declared by other researchers, and lacks empirical insight into the world of social media.

A series of gaps are thus apparent in today’s research body on social media and diffusion. ‘Time’ has become a major classification factor, that has led to over-homogenized results, as it fails to incorporate the critical qualitative differences between various users (Brandtzaeg, 2010). We thus find that current studies strive predominantly to determine user types on the basis of frequency of social media use, and thereby fail to acknowledge the importance of understanding the gratification, motivation and behaviour of these users. This complexity thus ascertains a need for the development of a more nuanced description of how people use social media, and how it manages to diffuse through networks (Selwyn, Gorard & Furlong, 2005). On account of this we assert that empirical studies in the field do not utilise a broad enough sample of users and social media types to warrant a comprehensive on social media diffusion.

Lastly, we identify a disinclination of researchers to generate results that can be applied more practically, by incorporating real life cases and references to the industry. These academic findings are often seen in isolation and thereby fail to be translated into knowledge that can be employed by companies to improve the performance of social media products.

1.2.4 Problem identification
As general innovation diffusion theory is a framework or way of thinking dependent on the specific context for application, a series of challenges arise when applying it to a specific industry. Without the frame of reference on the subject in question, application can become hazy and diluted, thus failing to deliver any value or relevant insight. The application of a general framework (Rogers, 2003) to industry specific innovations, demands high scrutiny in the validity of results, as they often require a sui generis approach on account of idiosyncrasies with prior innovations. Through preliminary interviews with social media producers, repeat reference to terms
purported by Rogers (2003) arise. One in particular expresses their severe struggle to advance beyond early users, so to reach the mainstream market (RM, app. 1.1.1.1). In contrast, another conversation with a social media producer expressed a direct tactic to exclude such early users from their platform (TT, app. 1.1.1.2). This discrepancy lead us to question the application of such widely used terms and concepts for social media, and to consider the degenerative effects the implementation of such theory can have. Suggestions that the most advanced users should be first attracted to further diffuse an innovation was particularly unsettling. To further probe at the suspicion that such a strategy is ill-fitted to diffuse a social medium, we interviewed a likely ‘innovator’ (Rogers, 2003), paying particular attention to their motivation for use and the indications of a desire to further diffuse a social medium through their network. Through this preliminary research, it became apparent that the advanced user had a greater interest in the technical aspects of social media, rather than the connections the platform enabled (PL, 1.1.2.2). The user is thus unlikely to recommend, advocate and/or share a product with others. The preliminary inquiries, therefore uncover profound findings that motivate and justify further research to vindicate such discoveries.

Thus we appreciate prominent incompatibilities with Rogers’ diffusion theory in its application to social media. Given its widespread acceptance and use in the social media industry, this theory has been left un-criticised or challenged in its applicability to new technology. This subsistence may be a result of habit, rather than of proof or validity in its application to the successful diffusion of a modern innovation. With the above review of prior inquiry into our subject, we present our primary focus, where we seek to evolve the body of knowledge pertaining to the diffusion of social media innovations.
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

How is a social medium diffused?

1.4 PROJECT DESIGN

1.4.1 Purpose

1.4.1.1 Value

Driven by curiosity and interest in the diffusion of social media products, and on the account of the increasing popularity of this channel as a standard mode of communication, this thesis seeks to further the understanding of why so many social media products fail to reach the mainstream market and how this can be rectified. To do so, we hereon make an inquiry into both the motivations and behaviors of social media consumers and juxtapose those with the strategies of the companies who create the platforms.

Essentially, this research addresses the recurring assumptions made by many companies in the industry who rely on theory that predates the invention of the products they produce. We believe that this dependency ensues blindsightedness and negligence to pertinent signals and circumstances, that should be closely monitored and continuously adapted. Thus this thesis is relevant, as it contributes new insight into the behaviour and motivations of social media users, and attempts to resolve the misaligned theory, that continues to create gaps in the understanding of how to best approach users, so to increase the likelihood of long-term success.

1.4.1.2 Objectives

This thesis and the results identified will seek to;

- Define adopter groups for social media.
- Identify and understand the motivation, attachment and use of social media by the various adopter groups.
- Understand the relationships between users of social media.
- Deconstruct the theory of innovation diffusion, and reconstruct it to fit social media innovations.
- Provide a diffusion framework for creators of social media.

1.4.2 Approach
Based on the theoretical foundations for innovation diffusion, we identify a series of key points to use as a launchpad in generating a new approach to social media users.

We will begin with an empirical approach, to enable the categorisation of the social media users into their respective groups. From there, to gain an insight into how their qualities affect diffusion, their behaviours will be applied to two crucial facets of traditional diffusion theory: the innovation-decision process and the adoption lifecycle. Addressing these two concepts allows for the typology to be applied broadly to the diffusion of a social medium.

*Fig. 1 - Key diffusion concepts*

Defining the innovation-decision process will serve to explain the motivations of the different adopter groups to distinguish where some resist adoption. Further, this can determine whether Rogers’ innovation-decision process has any relevance in its application to social media. Applying the adoption lifecycle, particularly the bell-curve (Rogers, 2003), will further establish whether a structured model outlining adoption patterns can be applied to social media, given its global, scattered and demographically diverse users. This will finally enable the testing of the fundamental question; are the *innovators*
Rogers (2003, p. 282) the appropriate group to lead a social media product into mainstream markets.

By presenting the typology in a broader context, we hope to gain a deeper insight into users' actual behaviour and how this differs from that in the original theory. Applying the theoretical findings in a practical context will assist in generating suggestions, that can enhance the odds of success for social media creators. Besides a series of real life case studies, facilitating the validity of the results and statements made, we aim to continuously compare the empirical findings with the selected literature presented below.

Fig. 2 - Literature

Rogers’ (2003) diffusion theory is used as the base of our research and juxtaposed and challenged throughout the thesis. Whilst we acknowledge that Bass (1969) and von Hippel (1986) promote theories highly applicable to this subject, Rogers’ theory demands re-evaluation in particular, due to its prominence. Likewise, we recognise the value of other prominent schools of theory including 1) the theory of uses and gratifications (Katz et al., 1974), which focuses on why users employ specific media channels to satisfy different needs, and 2) the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989), that models how users come to accept and use technology. However, due to the aforementioned reasons we have chosen not to focus heavily on these additional theories in the discussion, giving precedence to Rogers (2003).
To utilise this theory in a more modern and fitting context, we also depend on Moore (2000), as his reference to modern technology is more closely related to social media. His recognition of a ‘chasm’ inhibiting adoption, can additionally give another perspective on the barriers of diffusion. To gain a theoretical understanding of some of the points that differentiate social media from the products in Rogers’ theory, we integrate aspects of Normann’s study of service management (1991). Lastly, in an attempt to understand the community aspect of social media and the interaction between the various users, we integrate elements of Burt’s (1992) network analysis. In addition, various other literature will be integrated where appropriate. Use of existing theory throughout the thesis is supplementary to our empirical findings, and serves to either illustrate the incompetence in its application to social media, or to support unique findings.

The use of a sizable selection of demographics, as well as varying social media platforms, allow for comparisons and pattern analysis, rather than solely quantitative interpretation. By using our results to create qualitative support for over-arching and recurring findings, we can further understand the complex world of social media and generate new insights, that can serve to predict outcomes.

1.5 READING GUIDE

Table 1 - Reading guide

2.0 Methodology

This section will discuss the choices in the research design, and justify the value they can deliver. We will provide a detailed overview of the various types of data collected, the reasoning for each initiative, in addition to tables representing the various samples to validate the research. Additionally we will discuss how the collected data is addressed and analysed, in an attempt to create a clear understanding of our decisions in this stage. Lastly, we identify a series of ‘quality evaluation criteria’ to further strengthen the empirical findings made.
3.0 Bias and limitations

We present a series of potential biases and limitations, that can impact our research. This is to ensure clarity, validity and transparency in our study, but also to show the considerations and prioritisation for the choices made, to best reflect upon and overcome the identified problems.

4.0 Analysis

In the analysis we present our initial findings and their meaning. This chapter relies heavily on quantitative findings, but with a qualitative approach, constantly evaluating the findings critically within their context. The goal of this chapter is not only to extract key findings from the analysis of our research, but also to provide transparency and support for the statements made throughout the thesis. Lastly, on the basis of the extensive analysis, we present our recommendations for a new social media user typology. This will furthermore be compared with that of Rogers, to identify prime resemblances and differences that can be further discussed.

5.0 Discussion

In the discussion we aim to explore the extensive findings we have made, and put them within the context of the innovation-decision process, as well as the adoption lifecycle (Rogers, 2003). We will extensively discuss these concepts in comparison with our new user typology, and relate our findings back to real life case studies. Throughout the discussion we will be making a series of ‘generalisations’, comprised of short summaries of our findings; this is to provide the reader an overview of the process, to better comprehend the complexity of the study. The discussion seeks to further understand how social media users are different from those outlined in Rogers theory, with the goal of providing newfound understanding
of diffusion in social media, as well as insight for social media creators.

**6.0 Conclusion**

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Here we summarise the findings made in both the analysis and the discussion. Here, we also reflect upon the general differences and surprises identified throughout the research process. Lastly, we suggest a series of possible subjects for further research.

**7.0 Reference list**

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Here we present an overview of the various literature quoted or referenced throughout the thesis.

**8.0 Bibliography**

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Here we present an overview of the literature that influenced our research, and served as a foundation for our knowledge on the subject. Further, this background literature has assisted in the determination of our research question.
2.0 METHODOLOGY
2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODS

Social media is driven by users through both content and activity, and the understanding of these users is thus essential for the successful creation of a social media product. On account of this, our approach has been built around what we identify as a gap in the research body: a lack of focus on a broad, general selection of social media users across several platforms. Due to this gap, that also lead to the formation of our research question\(^1\), we find it essential to take an empirical approach and thus carry out a vast amount of data collection. The rich results gathered from this strategy, enables the analysis of our research question. What is particularly important is gathering data from the right people; in order to accomplish this, we carefully ensure that date is the gathered from sources, to both give insight into our problem and effectively help develop an understanding of the broad range of social media users.

After defining the research aim and question, as well as the theory which creates the foundation of our study, we address data collection, reduction and analysis. As the methodology has a great impact on the course of the research and the quality of data gathered, we discuss and justify our methodological choices, in relation to the research question.

In our methodology we thus aim to create an overview of the various acts of method collection carried out. Furthermore, we will discuss and evaluate the range of data

\(^1\) See p. 9
gathered, and provide a demographic overview of our selection. Lastly, we identify any bias and limitation that might affect the quality of our study. The following section seeks to provide clarity and transparency of the exhaustive processes that we undertake to gather and make sense of our data, to explain how we arrive at our findings.

2.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

2.2.1 Methodological paradigm
As a recent innovation, social media still remains quite unexplored from an academic point of view. By querying the application of older, classic theory to social media, we thus aspire to add to the lacking body of research, through the integration of practical observations and empirical data. Through direct interaction with social media users we take an empirical approach and aim to arrive at conclusions on the basis of observable data, to meet our objectives as outlined in the introduction.

Meaning is thus developed by examining the collected empirical data, and comparing the results and hypotheses against diffusion theory. By using empirical data to critically test and evaluate the application of Rogers (2003) diffusion theory on social media, we can overcome the contextual differences presented in our introduction and thus understand and respond appropriately to the complex dynamics of the subject.

Rogers' (2003) theory was critical in establishing the foundation of our research and continues to feature throughout the study, based on the hypothesis that the theory is not directly applicable to the diffusion of social media. However, as our research has evolved, the empirical data has taken a more central role, resulting in an approach governed more by grounded theory than initially expected. In doing so, while our ambition lay not in theory development, elements of grounded theory are employed in our empirical analysis. Corbin & Strauss (1988, p. 158) identifies grounded theory as when “theory evolves during actual research and it does this through continuous interplay

See p. 1
between analysis and data collection”. The approach is clearly reflected in this study as constant analysis, hypotheses and adjustment has resulted in a thorough and complex research process. Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, p. 154) put forth that “grounded theory methodology consists of a specific set of procedures for carving out the inbuilt middle-range theory from and with the help of the empirical data”. This is essential in the design of this study, to focus specifically on social media, without sacrificing the applicability that can be obtained from a broader, abstract delimitation.

### 2.2.2 Inductive and deductive reasoning

While theory and data cooperate in tandem through inductive and deductive reasoning, our study is inspired by both modes of research, as we move frequently between the two. The inductive approach, often deriving from the constructionist paradigm, starts with an examination of the social world, followed by the development of a theory consistent with that of the observed data. The deductive approach differs in its focus on operationalising theory, through the testing of hypotheses, in order to validate or reject them.

### 2.2.3 Hermeneutics

Throughout the research process, we continue to change and adapt our research question and approach; thus working within the so-called hermeneutic circle. This constitutes the methodological process of understanding, constructing and deepening a meaning during research activities (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 32). Starting with an often vague and intuitive understanding, the hermeneutic circle provides a cyclical perception of meaning creation, continuously interpreting and relating information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 210).

Thus, “based on the notion that research is a human, subjective activity but that this humanity is a crucial resource in the development of understanding” (McAuley, 2004, p. 201), it is assumed that our presuppositions will affect the gathering of data (Meyers, 2009, p. 165). Whilst allowing space for interpretation and acknowledging the existence of the researcher, we attempt to identify and account for potential biases in our analysis.
2.2.4 Design

The following section outlines the methods used for data collection, reduction and analysis and justifies the choices made for each process, as they infer a significant impact on the findings and further analysis. On the basis of our problem formulation and chosen research philosophy, it is obvious that a large selection of data should be gathered in order to provide a suitable insight into social media users (Punch, 2005, p. 44). We settle on the following types of data, which will be discussed in further detail:

- Preliminary interviews with social media companies and users
- Questionnaires distributed among social media users
- In-depth interviews with selected questionnaire respondents
- Case studies

In the initial stages of the data collection, we considered a practical observation study on a selection of volunteers. This approach was however discarded in its initial stages, yet some results were obtained and will be addressed further.

2.3 PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

To test our hypothesis and further develop our research question, it is essential to carry out preliminary interviews with social media companies and users, in the early stages of the research process.

2.3.1 Social media companies

These two case companies are chosen for the preliminary interviews, as both are within their first years of development of a social media, and are thus very closely involved with their users. The interviews with key members of the companies prove vital in confirming the direction of our research and rectifying our uncertainty. Additionally, both companies are easily accessible, due to personal relations; this helps encourage
honest and comfortable discussion to derive greater value.

Table 2 - Social media companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>App</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kinetik</td>
<td>Raul Moreno, CEO</td>
<td>RM</td>
<td>12.04.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>45 min</td>
<td>1.1.1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everplaces</td>
<td>Tine Thygesen, CEO</td>
<td>TT</td>
<td>27.04.2012</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>45 min</td>
<td>1.1.1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviewees were briefly introduced to our area of interest, and were informed that the discussion would be informal and conversational. Whilst both interviews were carried out using the same general interview structure, the conversations were allowed to take their own direction when suitable, to open up for as many potential discussion subjects as possible (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 82). The interviewees were asked to introduce their company, then further discussion focused on their users, their relationship to these and the approach undertaken to recruit them. Furthermore, the interviewees were asked about the initial stages of product development and deployment - again with a specific focus on the role of the users in this stage.

Due to the exploratory nature of these interviews, they are not used directly in our further discussion, however the importance and effect of these should not be undermined, as knowledge achieved from these continues to play a key role in our research.

2.3.2 Social media users

To support the initial findings gained from the interviews with social media companies, we test these against information gathered by interviewing selected social media users. Through our personal social media channels, we found two highly opinionated users who were willing to be interviewed. These were chosen on the basis of their high degree of dissimilarity, so to produce comparable data.
Table 3 - Social media users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>App</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>22.04.2012</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>24 min</td>
<td>1.1.2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>26.04.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>16 min</td>
<td>1.1.2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before the interview, both subjects were asked to fill out a simple questionnaire (http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MHRZZQN), about what social media sites they have an account on, how often they visit them and what their intentions were when they joined - these were used as the foundation for their respective interviews. Again, the interviewees were briefly introduced to our research and area of interest, and informed that the interview was to be informal and conversational.

Whilst both interviews were of great value in contributing to our research question, the interview with PL was particular rich, and has therefore been coded and used in our further research, along with the detailed social media user interviews later carried out.

2.4 QUESTIONNAIRES

2.4.1 Constructing the questionnaire

Based on the gaps in research and the characteristics identified by Rogers (2003), we select a series of subjects we wish to explore with our questionnaire (app. 2.1) and which we believe are important in the examination of diffusion in social media. The subjects are derived in part from dominant themes from Rogers’ (2003) user categorisation, to reflect any parallels and differences. The remaining subjects are created to represent the unique nature of social media and are generated on the basis of social media literature, as well as prior attempts at creating a social media user typology. The themes are as follows:

- Technical ability
- Amount of social media accounts
- Frequency of visits
- Amount of online connections
- Initiative and interest to join social media platforms
- Influence of friends

Furthermore, the questionnaire gathers some basic data on the respondents, including their gender, age, profession and current place of residence.

2.4.2 The questionnaire
Thirty-one social media platforms are selected, and range within four categories. Guided by our preliminary research, background knowledge of the most popular platforms in the market, and the case studies included in the discussion, we present a description of the four types of social media, along with the social media platforms used in this study.
### Table 4 - Platform categorisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Network</strong></th>
<th><strong>Content</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refers to platforms that support personal or professional relationships, and dialogue between account holders, while allowing for the customisation of individual profiles. Activity can be performed through dialogue and content creation, and users are encouraged to follow the profiles of other account holders, through ‘friendships’. This media is often dominated by online replicas of offline relationships.</td>
<td>Refers to platforms that promote the discovery, organisation, filtering and sharing of existing online content, through social interaction with other account holders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bebo</td>
<td>• deviantArt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facebook</td>
<td>• Dribbble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Google+</td>
<td>• Flickr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LinkedIn</td>
<td>• Soundcloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LiveJournal</td>
<td>• Vimeo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LiveJournal</td>
<td>• YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Myspace</td>
<td>• Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Orkut</td>
<td>• Tumblr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refers to platforms that enable account holders to share and broadcast unique, user-generated content, and for others to consume and interact with it.</td>
<td>Refers to platforms in the form of ‘apps’, that are developed for use on smartphones. These often focus on interaction and consumption on the go, based on location or real time sharing and updates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Delicious</td>
<td>- Everplaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Digg</td>
<td>- Foodspotting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 8tracks</td>
<td>- Foursquare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Goodreads</td>
<td>- Fribi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Kaboodle</td>
<td>- Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Last.fm</td>
<td>- Kinetik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pinterest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reddit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- StumbleUpon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Yelp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quora</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4.2.1 Structure

After identifying key demographic information, the users are asked to answer what social media enabled devices they own\(^3\), as well as how able they consider themselves to be technically. This is followed by asking on which of the 31 social media platforms listed the respondents have an account; regardless if they use the account or not.

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\(^3\) Respondents have the choice to select any number of the following: Smartphone, Tablets, Laptop, Desktop
Sequentially, respondents are asked a series of questions about the specific platforms on which they indicate they have an account; including their use of the platform and why they joined, how many people they are connected to on the specific site and how often they use it. This is followed by a list of possible actions indicating how they use the site, concluding with a series of statements focussed on the users’ opinions of and attachment to the product.

The questionnaire is carefully constructed to uncover the extent to which the users are active on the individual platforms. To do this, they are asked to indicate the extent to which they engage by browsing, ‘liking’, commenting on or sharing content created by friends, strangers, high-profile persons and celebrities, as well as companies. Further, respondents are asked whether they are likely to create their own content, share things found online and act upon information and events they have learned about on the social medium on each of the specific sites. Lastly, at the end of the survey respondents are asked to indicate if they are willing to participate in further research, by providing their name and email address.

2.4.3 Distribution
The questions are collected in an online questionnaire and distributed through a variety of social media channels. Our personal connections have also been encouraged to share the questionnaire, within their network. Lastly, several people have been approached outside of social media platforms, to ensure that users who are not as active and engaged online will still be represented in the research.

To further ensure a broad selection of respondents, we have each been given a unique URL, enabling us to track how many respondents from each of our networks have completed the survey. Being from Denmark and Canada respectively, it is important that each of our networks are used equally to gather data, as to ensure fair geographical representation of respondents.

4 Liking: Clicking a 'like' button to actively indicate to the original creator of the 'liked' content, that one acknowledges and appreciates such content.
2.4.4 Respondent demographics

After deactivating the questionnaire, invalid surveys are eliminated including those encompassing profanity, any incomplete surveys\(^5\) as well as duplicates; this has resulted in a total of 128 respondents.

Due to the online format of our questionnaire, we are unable to select and control the representativity of the respondents. However, to provide transparency in our results and to account for any potential biases, the demographics of the respondents have been analysed and compared to existing statistics on social media users.

The following demographics are determined on account of the initial mandatory questions, that are posed at the the beginning of each questionnaire.

2.4.4a Gender

Fig. 3 - Gender distribution

Of the valid questionnaires, we have had 76 females and 51 males complete the survey;

\(^5\) Due to the extensive size of our questionnaire, many respondents did not complete the survey. However, surveys whereby only one field has been left unanswered, likely because they have been overlooked or forgotten, have still been included. This can result in the total respondent number, not equating to 128 in specific questions.
equaling 60% women and 40% men. While these numbers are not equal, they are supported by general social media statistics, as a fair representation of the social media landscape; Pingdom (2012) finds that the majority of social media platforms have more female users than male.

2.4.4b Age

![Fig. 4 - Age distribution](image)

Our two largest groups of respondents are those aged 20-29, accounting for 66.4%. There are followed by the 30-39 year-old category, which accounts for 16.7% of all respondents. The remaining age groups range between >1 and 3%. Though statistics support that the dominant age groups in this study are likewise in social media in general (Pingdom, 2012), the other age groups should be better represented to create a fairer picture. This has been accounted for in our biases and limitations (p. 46).
Respondents are asked their profession, which is later grouped into 6 categories to give a better overview: primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary, student and unemployed. Primary consists of people involved in sourcing raw materials such as loggers, fishermen or miners. Secondary includes people working in processing raw material for example builders. Tertiary represents workers providing a service for example retail, hospitality or real estate workers. Lastly, quaternary consists of intellectuals such as managers or professionals working in government, technical or cultural companies.

Students and intellectuals represent a large part of the respondents, as these are a natural part of the networks the questionnaire was distributed to. This will be discussed further in our biases and limitations (p. 46).
Results on geographic location show that respondents are widely represented from a total of 20 countries. Again, the results have been somewhat impacted by the networks they were distributed within, however the sample still represents an impressive geographical spread; broader than in previous studies.

2.4.5 Questionnaire data reduction

As our questionnaires present a significant amount of data, it is vital to reduce this information into a workable format. Over a period of two weeks, through trial and error, we attempted to sort, code and analyse the vast amount of data. This process was long and tedious as the data initially presented no clear patterns or results, however it also played an essential role in itself, in the later analysis and discussion of the final results.

All questionnaires have been printed, equating to over 500 pages. Due to the plethora of our results and the lack of a clear mode to make sense of the rich data, we use systemised approaches to attempt to break down the results and uncover any patterns that can prove valuable. While many of these attempts are rejected, they allow us to gradually uncover how to make use of the results. To arrive at this point of lucidity, we employ a series of techniques to “reduce the number of variables, [...] without losing the
Through these various attempts of systemising, visually sorting, extracting exemplary data and re-sorting, evaluation criteria and patterns are emphasised and help us shape the analysis and better understand the results. Thus, despite the trial and error nature of the analysis, this process proves extremely valuable and lead to a much more complex and exhaustive dissection of the questionnaires through the following methods of sorting:

2.4.5a Sorting method no. 1
First, we attempt to categorise users into groups based on the amount of platforms on which they have an account. However, with this attempt it became increasingly difficult to find patterns indicating potential user groups. This lead to the recognition, that the social media platforms used in the survey cannot all be considered equal, when used to measure how advanced the users are in their use of social media. It therefore becomes apparent, that a more nuanced form of analysis must be carried out. Users active on few, less mainstream platforms, can not be categorised together with users owning the same amount of accounts, but on well-known, and popular sites.

2.4.5b Sorting method no. 2
Based on the findings from the first round of coding, this second method takes the disparity of social media platforms into account. Thus, to better represent the value of complex or rare sites, a grading system is implemented; complex or rare platforms are given a higher value, than are mainstream products, such as Facebook, which are valued much lower. Respondents are then awarded points according to the specific platforms on which they have an account, rather than only the amount they own. Once tallied, users are organised sequentially from least to greatest total number of points and divided into groups, when notable gaps in points permits.

However, this formula for categorisation is likewise rejected, as was the case with sorting method no. 1, no identifiable patterns were discovered.

2.4.5c Sorting method no. 3
Consequently through the various methods of sorting, the complexity of the data is
acknowledged, as is the depth of analysis needed to understand it. Due to the diverse demographics of social media users (Blakley, 2011), age, location and profession are not seen as suitable sorting mechanisms. Instead, we identify elements that are not considered in the application of the original theory of diffusion (Rogers, 2003), to a typology of social media users.

Based on this, each questionnaire is analysed on an individual basis, by summarising key findings about each respondent; thereby translating the quantitative data into qualitative findings. The following is thus accounted for in our final categorisation of the respondents, as they are fundamental, differentiating elements, that set our findings apart from prior research:

*Table 5 - Assessment criteria*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount of accounts</strong></td>
<td>How many platforms is a user active on, and how many inactive accounts do they own?</td>
<td><em>We acknowledge both active and inactive accounts, as indicators of a user's behaviour and propensity for social media.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of platforms</strong></td>
<td>What platforms is a user active on, and what platforms does a user own inactive accounts on?</td>
<td><em>We denote varying value to platforms that are widely used, versus those that are niche, and thereby account for not only how many platforms a user has an account on, but also which platforms. We further assess which of these are in use, in contrast to those that are idle or never put into use.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of visits</strong></td>
<td>How often does a user visit a social media platform?</td>
<td><em>N/A</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Device</strong></td>
<td>What devices are utilized by a user to access social media?</td>
<td><em>N/A</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of networks</strong></td>
<td>How many connections does a user have on social media?</td>
<td><em>We assess the size of a user’s network on each social medium on which they have an account.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of connections</strong></td>
<td>Who does a user communicate with on social media?</td>
<td><em>We take into account if the user mainly communicates with friends, strangers, companies or high profiled people and celebrities.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td>Why does the user sign up for a social medium?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of attachment</strong></td>
<td>How attached is the user to social media?</td>
<td><em>This is gauged on a user’s likelihood of recommending a site to others, how a user would cope without access to particular sites, or if they would be likely to switch to competing products.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of engagement</strong></td>
<td>How much content does the user create or interact with?</td>
<td><em>We assess engagement levels by measuring the extent to which a user browses, interacts with others’ content or create their own.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of engagement</td>
<td>What is the quality of the content and interaction carried out by the user?</td>
<td>This measures how much thought is given to content created and how aware and cautious a user is when portraying themselves on social media.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This initial review is followed by a reflection process, whereby each respondent is discussed separately and grouped with other respondents bearing similar attributes. Lastly, each group of respondents are discussed and key patterns found and summarised, resulting in seven separate groups.

On account of further debate, several of the groups have been amalgamated due to great similarities of major features, thereby resulting in a reduction to five final user groups. Lastly, these groups are compared with the results from the first two sorting methods, and adjustments made for individual respondents where fit.

### 2.5 INTERVIEWS

To obtain a deeper understanding of how members of the five groups differ in their use of and relationship to social media, a series of follow up interviews are carried out. These interviews are used to further help us identify key traits of each of the user groups, and solidify or refute the findings gathered from the questionnaires. We thereby follow Kvale’s (1996, p. 32) philosophy whereas the “focus is on nuanced descriptions that depicted the qualitative diversity, the many differences and varieties of a phenomenon, rather than on ending up with fixed categorizations.” In doing so, we uncover a deeper
understanding of the users’ emotional relationship to social media, and provide a more elaborate understanding of the variance of users’ personalities. This is necessary to create an accurate user typology.

These interviews serve as the fundamental point at which we depart and add a qualitative element to prior research, that seeks to understand and create a classification of social media users on account of their use of, behavior on, and relationship to social media.

2.5a Semistructured interviews

According to Kvale (1996, p. 291) “The very strength of the interview is its privileged access to the common understanding of subjects that provides their worldview and the basis for their actions”. Thus, our emotional interview approach is set up to uncover “the participants’ authentic experiences” and understand their “perceptions, conceptions, understandings, viewpoints, and emotions” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 79). Using semi-structured interviews allow us to use a prepared outline of topics and themes, whilst still having the option to customise each interview (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 82).

Thus, the interviews follow a set structure that is deviated only, when the respondent’s answers prompt new curiosities that are not included in the original set of questions. Respondents are therefore also encouraged to make their own interpretations of questions, and take the interview in the direction they see fit. That said, it is ensured that all general areas are covered, and supplemented with individual questions for the specific respondents where fit. As “a qualitative research interview seeks to cover both factual and a meaning level” (Kvale, 1996, p. 32), our interviews has enabled the gathering of comparable data; facilitating the comparison of like questions.

2.5.1 Interview guide

The interview guide (app. 1.2a) used for the ten post-questionnaire interviews, is created to reveal information about the three overall themes (Rogers, 2003), that represent the focus of this study:

- Adopter categories
- Innovation-decision process
- Adoption lifecycle

As discussed earlier, these themes are identified as key aspects of the original diffusion theory, and thus create the foundation of the interview guide. Questions are composed within these themes to provide insights into both diffusion of social media in general, and specific adopter behaviours. The following provide an overview of the areas explored within each theme;
Table 6 - Interview themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adopter categories</th>
<th>Innovation-decision process</th>
<th>Adoption lifecycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Opinions on social media</td>
<td>- Effect of friends on social media decision process</td>
<td>- Time of joining various social media sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relationship to social media</td>
<td>- Evaluation criteria and comprehensive decision process of new social media platforms</td>
<td>- Reasons for joining social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perception of own behaviour on social media</td>
<td>- Early behaviour on a social media platform</td>
<td>- Frequency of visits to social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Actual behaviour on social media</td>
<td>- Sourcing of and exposure to new social media platforms</td>
<td>- Dependency on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Thoughts about privacy on social media</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Relationship to other users of social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intentions for social media use</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Perceived value of social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopter categories</td>
<td>Innovation-decision process</td>
<td>Adoption lifecycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with friends and strangers on social media</td>
<td>Evaluation criteria of new social media platforms</td>
<td>Likelihood to terminate social media accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General relationship to technology and the internet</td>
<td>Reaction to changes of social media interfaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of friends and networks on social media</td>
<td>Opinion on branding of social media sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We make minor adjustments to the interview guide where necessary to fit the individual respondent on account of learnings from prior interviews.

2.5.2 Samples
The interviewees are picked based on a specific set of criteria, to ensure a fairly wide selection of samples. The following factors are taken into consideration during the selection of potential interviewees;

- Gender
- Age
- Profession
- Location

To give the reader an overview of the diversity of our samples, we provide the profiles
of our interviewees, presented in a random order and without reference to their name or transcript, for the sake of data protection. We thus end up with the following user profiles, ensuring a wide selection of demographics within our interviewees;

Table 7 - Interviewee demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile 1</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profile 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59 years</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35 years</td>
<td>Phd. student</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>IT Support</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55 years</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Business Development</td>
<td>Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>Communication Manager</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24 years</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile 11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24 years</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interview process, we learn that a number of the interviewees, categorised on the basis of their survey, belong to different groups than initially expected. These
users are moved to less advanced user groups and new respondents are found to replace them. On account of this, adjustments are made to the interview plans so that all interviewees are designated to the correct group.

The ten interviews carried out, comprise two users from each potential user group, to effectively gain a broad representation and formalise the quality of our primary data. As our preliminary user interviews are used as a departure in the creation of the final research design, we have decided to use the interview of PL (app. 1.1.2.2) and code it together with the ten others. On account of this, this qualitative data is comprised of a total of eleven user interviews. With the exception of the preliminary interview with PL, all interviews are conducted over a nine day period.

**Table 8 - Interviewee overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>02.08.2012</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>24 min.</td>
<td>1.2.1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>02.08.2012</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>1.2.1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.04.2012</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>24 min.</td>
<td>1.1.2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31.07.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>27 min.</td>
<td>1.2.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>09.08.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>19 min.</td>
<td>1.2.2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>06.08.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>19 min.</td>
<td>1.2.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WL</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.08.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>25 min.</td>
<td>1.2.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31.07.2012</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>46 min.</td>
<td>1.2.4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>06.08.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>13 min.</td>
<td>1.2.4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>04.08.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>18 min.</td>
<td>1.2.5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>09.08.2012</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>15 min.</td>
<td>N/A 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

6 Due to technical failures, this interview was unable to be transcribed, as the recording failed. The results from this interview still contribute to our findings.
2.5.3 Decomposing the interviews

Our initial assumptions about social media, user motivation, adopter categories and adoption barriers set various guidelines that influence the way in which our interviews are coded. Further, our pre-understanding of previously formed adoption theory, general observations on social media and use-based knowledge also impact our results. This approach resembles concept driven coding (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 202), whereby the researcher has formulated codes in advance. However, open-coding is to a certain extent integrated in our analysis, since the collected data and the analysis here-of is constantly reviewed as new concepts and themes emerge or prove of greater importance than earlier assumed.

Thus, to make sense of our extensive qualitative data, all interviews are transcribed and coded. Following the structure set forth by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) we follow the basic procedures of qualitative coding by:

1. Acknowledging relevant phenomena
2. Collecting examples of those phenomena
3. Analysing those phenomena to uncover patterns, differences, commonalities and structures

Through the process of coding, we classify our empirical data into themes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 128), and thus condense the extensive interview texts by providing overview and structure (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 201). Transcriptions are organised according to user group, and individually colour coded according to six recurring themes:

1. Decision process related to adoption
2. Privacy and personal presentation
3. Opinions and emotions
4. Behavior
5. Desired/revered attributes

6. Network and community

All valuable quotes are assembled according to theme, within each specific user group; creating a usable overview of patterns and opinions within each group. This process plays a key role in the identification of common user group traits and exemplary quotes to illustrate these, feature throughout the thesis.

2.6 CASE STUDIES

In an effort to contrast the lacking body of research, a series of case studies will feature throughout the discussion. This research strategy aids in the understanding of complex issues arising from the empirical data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 117). Additionally, the use of case studies support the uniqueness of the study and research question.

2.6.1 Pinterest case

To further understand and study the stages of adoption of a new social media and further learn about adoption barriers, we enlist individuals to participate in a case study designed to examine their adoption process. This is tested on Pinterest, an online visual bookmarking service, launched as a closed beta in March 2010, that quickly generated large amounts of media attention and subsequent mass user signups.

Ten participants are recruited through our own social media networks, by requesting interested persons to complete an online webform7. As with our interviewees, these are carefully selected to reflect diversity. The participants are requested to commence usage of the platform, and through regular interviews we aim to gain knowledge about their experience and challenges faced, in using a new social media site. A package of

7 Pinterest observation study webform on Podio, http://podio.com/webforms/1505284/88215
empowerment resources (app. 2.2) are provided to each user. As most of the volunteers express prior intention of signing up, the empowerment resources are meant as motivation to overcome any barriers having impeded them earlier. With that said, we act as catalysts to accelerate the participants' sign-up and usage of Pinterest.

The study is carried out over a period of a month, and prompts and reminders are periodically sent. Whilst offering support and technical assistance if needed, conversation also gathers insight into the users' experience. However, when learning that none of the participants had actively used the site, the study is cancelled. Nevertheless, significant findings are derived and continuously affect the analysis of other results, particularly in relation to adoption.

2.6.2 Supportive case-studies

When analysing and applying our empirical research, we find it important to ground our research in real life cases; various supportive case-studies are thus featured throughout. By using real-life cases as supportive scenarios to strengthen proposed findings, the cases further act as “instruments”, assisting in the development and testing of general theoretical propositions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 119).

The following cases are constructed from relevant news stories and our industry-related knowledge. The following are integrated where findings arise, that can explain the events related to these eminent cases.
Table 9 - Supportive case-studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Featured on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myspace</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinetik</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everplaces</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.7 QUALITY EVALUATION CRITERIA

By adopting explicit evaluation criteria, the transparency of our research is enhanced and thus conveys the strengths and limitations of our research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 290). Due to the analytical and interpretative nature of the study, we attempt to overcome these challenges by applying the following quality evaluation criteria:

2.7a Transparency

To create a traceable and well documented study, we collect transcripts, questionnaires, and all other relevant material in the appendix when possible. Furthermore, the approach and intentions behind each initiative is explained in the methodology and supported by relevant literature. Lastly, quotes and extracts used in the analysis reference the appendix accordingly, to allow for easy verification of facts.
2.7b Reflexivity
Great care is taken to critically outline any biases and to reflect how practical initiatives and methodological choices affect results. Furthermore, the limitations of the research is reviewed and possible further research identified.

2.7c Clarity
To create clarity, highlighted ‘generalisations’ feature throughout the thesis. These are to highlight important findings and avoid misinterpretation of results, due to the reader’s possible predispositions. These generalisations have been collected in the appendix (app. 4.1) to provide an easy overview of conclusions. Furthermore, the appendix presents a glossary of key terms (app. 4.2) used throughout the thesis. This is to prevent any misunderstandings of results, due to variations in interpretation.

2.7d Validity
Validity plays an essential role throughout; not only is the research question founded in the attempt to test the validity of Rogers’ (2003) theory against social media, we also strive to validate our own research, by constantly providing the reader with explanations, overviews and background knowledge for our decisions.
3.0 BIAS AND LIMITATIONS
3.0 BIAS AND LIMITATIONS

3.1 CHANNELS OF DATA COLLECTION

The majority of our data is collected by distributing the questionnaire through our own social media profiles. This means that the respondents comprise mainly people within our networks, thus resulting in a large selection of tech-industry professionals and students or graduates.

Furthermore, it is probable that the technically advanced and frequent social media users are more likely to respond to our requests, than are less advanced or frequent users. Action is taken to rectify this, through distribution of the questionnaire outside of social media to ensure less advanced users are also represented.

3.2 PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH INTERVIEWEES

As the majority of interviewees are personally related to us, we take great care to prevent this from affecting our research. In doing so, we avoid providing any interviewee with details or in-depth explanations of our research question, to ensure honesty and genuineness in their responses. However, after coding and analysing the interviews, we believe the personal and friendly atmosphere, enables the interviewees to speak their minds freely, thus enhancing the quality of our results (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, 57).
3.3 FACEBOOK AS A MAINSTREAM MEDIUM

The social networking site Facebook features both in our questionnaire and interviews. As Facebook is so widely adopted, it features heavily in most users' online behaviour and can falsely enhance our results. This is particularly the case with the least advanced user groups with whom Facebook may be their only social medium.

Whilst the importance of Facebook cannot be undervalued and continues to feature in this study, we acknowledge the impact it can have and thus account for this in our analysis. Through the inclusion of niche platforms in our questionnaire, we gather insight into the behaviours of advanced users of social media and balance the bias that Facebook may have caused.

3.4 USER GROUP SIZES

As the respondents are allocated to the respective user groups, these prove to be of substantially differing sizes. Though we do not strive to determine the dimensions of these groups, the analysis of the smaller groups do not have as great an empirical foundation, as do the larger groups. This has an effect on our quantitative data, as one user's behaviour can heavily impact the overall results for their group respectively. To overcome this, we ensure that quantitative results are supported by interview findings, whilst we continue to take this imbalance into account.

3.5 SIZE OF THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE

During our interviews, we discover that several of the interviewees must be moved to other user groups than that of their initial placement. As we gain a detailed insight into
the behavior of the interviewees, we discover their answers to the questionnaire are not always an accurate representation of their user group. As time restricts us from interviewing every questionnaire respondent, we acknowledge this as a limitation, as other questionnaire respondents might have been wrongly categorised.

Through the extensive interview process and application of cases, our findings are in a constant stage of review and comparison to enable critical evaluation. In light of this, categorisation choices for the questionnaire respondents are altered where necessary.

### 3.6 CATEGORISATION OF PLATFORMS

Our choices in the selection and categorisation of platforms used in this study, may present a bias, as it has been constructed on the basis of our own knowledge of the market, various media publications, statistics and existing attempts of classification. Therefore, these are not made on account of existing, official, academic delimitations. However, this categorisation does not play a critical role in the continuous analysis and discussion of results, and as such is not expected to generate any major discrepancies.
4.0 ANALYSIS
4.0 ANALYSIS

In the following section, we present the findings obtained from our research. These results are a compilation of the answers of 128 respondents, collectively owning 659 social media accounts, as well as interviews with a selection of them. Based on this, we convey a series of quantitative representations of our results, which we briefly analyse and reflect upon. To further strengthen these, we integrate quotes and knowledge gained from the qualitative research in our final user typology; here the groups will be briefly compared to the fundamental qualities defining Rogers’ (2003) adopter groups.

The formation of our user groups has been an ongoing, active process, that has taken place from the onset of questionnaire distribution through to the follow-up interviews, as new insights have arisen thereby demanding continuous alterations to the groups. Whilst the statistical findings, as presented here, were assembled after the analysis of our questionnaire respondents and subsequent interviews, we provide them to support the validity of our analytical process, and gain insight into the common characteristics of the groups as a whole, rather than as similar individuals. The patterns found in this data, further our understanding of the groups and assist in the later creation of the ultimate typology, where the groups are given names and personas. Thus at this point, the groups will only appear in order of number, Group 1 being the least advanced and Group 5 being the most advanced.
4.1 FINDINGS

4.1.1 Group introduction
To provide a clear and honest representation, we give a brief overview of the size of the groups, as well as the amount of accounts held between them.

*Table 10 – Group introduction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Size of group</th>
<th>Total number of accounts</th>
<th>Average number of accounts per user</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>8.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Number of accounts
Respondents are asked to identify every social media site on which they have an account, of the 31 proposed sites used in the questionnaire. The following results thus represent the percentage of users within each group and the distribution of accounts between them.
### Table 11 - Number of accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Users</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6-9</th>
<th>10-12</th>
<th>13-15</th>
<th>16-19</th>
<th>20+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is indeed a clear connection between the number of accounts a user has and in the group to which they belong. We observe that the less advanced groups have fewer accounts, than the more advanced groups; the distribution of accounts increases incrementally with Group 1 having the fewest amount and Group 5 the highest. The value and importance of this division will be discussed further.

#### 4.1.3 Distribution of platforms

As respondents were asked to indicate on which of the 31 platforms they have an account, we are able to gain further insight into the subtle differences of the respondents’ preferences. We acknowledge the amount and type of account is of equal importance and therefore present the distribution of accounts between both the individual platforms and the four categorisations of social media type (network, content, service and mobile).

---

1 Total number of users = 128.
4.1.3a Platform distribution

The percentages show how many users within each of the groups, have an account on each site. The sites are presented in order of most to least popular, on the basis of the total number of accounts held on each platform, by all respondents.

Table 12 - Platform distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>Group 5</th>
<th>Group 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of accounts</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average number of accounts</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>17.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Flickr</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Last.fm</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Foursquare</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>StumbleUpon</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>deviantArt</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>8tracks</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of accounts = 659
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>Group 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Delicious</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Goodreads</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Soundcloud</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Digg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dribbble</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Quora</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Vimeo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Everplaces</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Yelp</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Orkut</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Fribi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Bebo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Kinetik</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Kaboodle</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Foodspotting</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We find that the popular platforms held by the respondents in our study, have a high degree of resemblance to those of social media users in general (eBiz, 2012). Furthermore, the less advanced groups tend to only hold accounts on mainstream sites, while as groups become more advanced, niche platforms are progressively used. Interestingly, we also find that the most advanced social media users (Group 5), are not deterred from the mainstream platforms, but rather use them to the same extent as the other groups, whilst simultaneously using a number of lesser known platforms.

4.1.3b Platform-category distribution

The percentages are based on how many of the accounts held by specific user groups, fall within each of the social media platform categories. These are presented in order of most to least popular.
Table 13 - Platform-category distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of accounts</th>
<th>Average number of accounts</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By categorising the platforms on which respondents have an account into the four categories, we see a strong pattern in the type of social media platforms, used by each group. Here we find that the distribution of the four types of media become increasingly even, as the groups increase in advanceness. On the basis of the groups technological adeptness we can thus derive from the above distribution, that network driven social media is the most commonly used platform type, whereas the mobile driven platforms are generally used only by advanced users.

4.1.4 Frequency of visits

Respondents are asked how often they use each of the social media sites, on which they have an account. As most users have more than one account, each account is calculated as a separate answer within the respondent’s user group and allocated to the respective column indicating frequency of use.

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3 For breakdown, see Table 4 pp. 23-24
Table 14 - Total frequency of visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of accounts</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Yearly</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 - Frequency of visits by group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of accounts</th>
<th>Average number of accounts</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Yearly</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is not as clear a difference between the user groups, as initially expected. Upon first glance, these findings show that all user groups have a considerable amount of accounts not in use, and that Group 2 to Group 4 are much more likely to use accounts daily, than are Group 1 and Group 5. However, these results must be seen in relation to the average amount of accounts held by a user in each of the groups. To illustrate this, we consider the average number of accounts used daily by Group 3 in contrast to those used by Group 5. So, while Group 5 appear to have few frequently used accounts, it must be taken into consideration that users from this group hold an average of 17 accounts. Therefore, while Group 3 have an average of 5 accounts equating to 1.65 daily-used accounts, the average user in Group 5 use 3.4 accounts daily.

On account of this, we likewise acknowledge that Group 5 have a large proportion of
accounts used monthly or less frequently, totalling 49% of their average of 17 accounts (8.3 accounts), compared to 45% of Group 3’s 5 average accounts (2.25 accounts). Based on this, we can thereby conclude that though Group 5 are avid users of social media, they are also likely to own a large number of rarely used or idle accounts, that do not generate value for a social medium.

4.1.5 Device

Respondents are asked which devices they use to access each of the social media sites, on which they have an account. As users have the option to choose more than one answer for each site, each account can contribute several answers per response (a maximum of four).

Table 16 - Total devices used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Desktop</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Smartphone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1013</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17 - Device by group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Average number of accounts</th>
<th>Desktop</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Smartphone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These findings are particularly valuable in providing a stronger understanding of the technical skills possessed by each of the user groups, their reliance on the various technologies they use, as well as their dependency on social media.

It is surprising that Group 1 depends heavily on using an iPad for social media use, whilst their smartphones have little to no importance. This can indicate these users rarely check their social media accounts whilst on the go, or is a possible symptom of these users being more likely to own an iPad, than they are a smartphone. In contrast, the younger of the users, Group 3, who are more computer-literate, depend heavily on their mobile devices as well as their laptops, probably as these are used in the context of school and/or work.

It is important to acknowledge the difference between social media that is only available on mobile devices, in contrast to mobile versions of media platforms, that are accessible on both mobile and computer. So, as Group 3 scores highly on mobile devices, as they are likely to check network focused platforms (such as Facebook) on their mobile phone when on the go; Group 5’s high percentage on this specific question is due to their propensity for social media that only function on mobile devices, such as instant location-based sharing apps.

Group 5 scores relatively evenly across all devices, as they use all four equally to access their accounts. However, when looking at the individual questionnaires, it becomes apparent that this is a result of these users often owning all of the mentioned devices and using them on a frequent basis. As these users engage intensively in their online communities, they are likely to check in on their social media platforms frequently, on the device they have access to at that given point; for instance, they will use a smartphone while shopping, opting for a an iPad at home, and favoring a laptop to check into social media whilst working.

4.1.6 Connections
Respondents are asked how many friends they are connected to, on the various social media sites on which they have an account. While most users have several accounts, each account indicated is counted as a separate answer. Respondents can only select one
answer per account.

Table 18 - Total connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of accounts</th>
<th>0-10</th>
<th>10-50</th>
<th>50-100</th>
<th>100-200</th>
<th>200-400</th>
<th>400-1000</th>
<th>1000+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19 - Connections by group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of accounts</th>
<th>Average number of accounts</th>
<th>0-10</th>
<th>10-50</th>
<th>50-100</th>
<th>100-200</th>
<th>200-400</th>
<th>400-1000</th>
<th>1000+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, these results show that social media users in general have considerably more accounts on which they are not connected to any other users, than they have accounts on which they are. However, it is important to consider the reasons behind this, as well as how this reasoning differs between the various groups.

Whilst Group 1 have several accounts on which they are connected to very few people, this is not deliberate. Rather, it may be a consequence of Group 1 users not having any more people to connect with on social media, or an indication of Group 1’s lack of technical know-how in understanding how to connect with others; they may rely solely on having users either follow or request to connect with them, requiring no initiation on their part. Furthermore, one must also remember that users, such as those in Group 1 and Group 2, tend to own very few accounts; thus a high percentage value indicates
a smaller number of accounts for these groups, than it would for a group with a higher average number of accounts, such as Group 5.

Due to the extensive number of social media sites they sign up for, users in Group 5 have a large number of accounts, on which they have very few to no connections. This is not because they do not know anyone with whom to connect, but because they sign up with the sole intention of trialling a newly launched product, and do not invest the time to add their connections or rally for friends to join. Additionally, the high number of accounts with few connections, held by Group 5, can also be a consequence of these existing on platforms that have not yet attracted many users, or those that will never reach a broad enough audience, to justify their return post-sign up.

4.1.7 Reasons for joining

Respondents are asked the primary reasons for joining each of the social media platforms, on which they have an account. To accurately express their motivations, respondents are allowed to respond with more than one reason for joining, per account.

Table 20 - Total reasons for joining

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of replies</th>
<th>I had need for the service</th>
<th>My friends use it</th>
<th>I was curious</th>
<th>I was invited by a friend</th>
<th>I had read about it in the press</th>
<th>Work purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>1016</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21 - Reasons for joining by group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of replies</th>
<th>Average number of accounts</th>
<th>I had need for the service</th>
<th>My friends use it</th>
<th>I was curious</th>
<th>I was invited by a friend</th>
<th>I had read about it in the press</th>
<th>Work purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2</strong></td>
<td>224</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 3</strong></td>
<td>463</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 4</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 5</strong></td>
<td>119</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like some of the other quantitative results, those related to reasons for joining are not as clear, as expected prior to their analysis. Firstly, most groups appear to have joined predominantly out of curiosity; thus on their own initiative. However, when analysing the questionnaires individually, we find that most users indicating they have joined because ‘[they] were curious’, also selected an additional reason for joining. We therefore interpret ‘curiosity’ as a supportive reason, rather than the sole basis for joining and do not regard this as a strong indicator of the various groups’ motivations.

It is also surprising that Groups 2 to 5 depend fairly equally on friends4, when joining a new medium. However, further exploring this finding through our qualitative research, it becomes clear that the motivation behind this statement differs vastly for the separate groups. For the less advanced groups, friends motivate the act of joining when having amassed to a substantial enough degree for the user to feel obliged to also join. On the other hand, Group 5 requires only a select few persons or valued connections to mention

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4 Account for both the answers 'My friends use it' and 'I was invited by a friend'.
a medium to motivate joining, so to participate in discussions either on, or about the platform. However, in both cases, one could argue that users join the platform because of friends.

Though only 4% of Group 5 users indicate they have joined a platform for reasons related to work, our qualitative results show that besides working in technology-related professions, these users also have a personal interest in and dependency on using social media as a primary means of communication. They are thus likely to join on their own initiative.

Further we find that Groups 3 and 4 are also motivated by work. For Group 4 this can be a result of these users often maintaining marketing positions, requiring them to work directly with social media. Also, when inspecting the questionnaires, we find that Group 3 (consisting largely of students), often have LinkedIn accounts to enhance career prospects. As these users are likely to have chosen ‘For work purposes’ in this instance, this may have had an impact on our results. Lastly, Group 1 is also highly affected by their work when joining; likely in an effort to keep up with technological developments, that may impact their professional lives - this may also be the reason why they are influenced by messages from media and press sources, related to social media.

4.2 SOCIAL MEDIA USER TYPOLOGY

On the basis of the analysis of the results, we will deepen our understanding of the five groups and their motivations, through the application of our extensive interviews with users. This enables the generation of characteristics and personas, and helps to set our user groups apart from those of Rogers (2003). Like Rogers, we also categorise our users into five groups, and while there are many similarities to Rogers’ adopter groups (2003, p. 282), there are also many differences. The concepts and ideas presented in this brief comparison will be extensively discussed and applied throughout the analysis.

5 A professional social network for contact sharing and job applications.
Due to social networks and relationships being an integral element, inherent in all social media, we have found inspiration for our groups in another familiar and distinctive social world: the high school. By using characters from this setting, we are able to clearly present the different user groups and their personalities, as well as how these interact with one another. From here on, we will refer to our groups, according to their corresponding high school persona, as presented below:

*Fig. 7 - Group names*

- **Group 1** → The Outsiders
- **Group 2** → The Wallflowers
- **Group 3** → The Cliques
- **Group 4** → The Preps
- **Group 5** → The Nerds

At this point, it is also important to acknowledge, that the attributes allocated to the various online personas, do not necessitate that the social media user employ the same role in their offline life. The user groups thus only predict behaviours and interactions online.
4.2.1 The Outsiders aka Group 1

4.2.1.1 Profile

The Outsiders have very few friends, on whom they depend heavily. They are unlikely to speak without reservation when sharing opinions and information. Due to high levels of insecurity, they are passive in their interaction with their surroundings and thus often become isolated from the greater community.

4.2.1.2 Findings

This group is likely to have only one social media account; on Facebook. While the Outsiders do not seek out new platforms, they rather need to be enlightened by others about the benefits obtainable from a social medium. Therefore, members of this group are often invited by a friend or family member, and are likely to connect only with a few, close acquaintances. They will never create their own content, in the form of status
updates or pictures, and will often only browse others’ content; rarely commenting or ‘liking’.

The Outsiders use minimal time on social media and therefore do not have a strong attachment or opinion about it. As a result they are likely to forget about the platforms on which they have an account and often fail to use them regularly, due to a lack of online routine. Their lack of adeptness can also result in unfavorable attitudes, towards changing online behaviours or adopting new platforms. The Outsiders are thus highly passive and extremely novice in both how they use technology and social media. Consequently, privacy concerns, an inability to use the full scope of sites and dependency on close connections are common tendencies for these users.

The Outsiders are typically middle-aged (~35–60+), with very simplistic technological ability and or skills; further, they are generally only active upon network based media.

4.2.1.3 The Outsiders vs. the Laggards

Strong similarities are apparent between the Outsiders and Rogers’ ‘Laggards’ (2003, p. 284) who, “[possess] almost no opinion leadership,” as their “decisions are often made in terms of what has been done previously and […] interact primarily with others who also have relatively traditional values”. Rogers (2003) further identifies this type of user as suspicious of innovations and slow to complete the innovation-decision process. This supports our findings, that this group is present only on the best-known social media and is often highly troubled by potential privacy issues (KR, 2012, app. 1.2.5.1).

However, in opposition to Rogers (2003) and Moore (2000) who argue that efforts to attract these reluctant users are a waste of resources, we find the Outsiders possess a great willingness to interact. Having said that, their lack of technological knowledge makes them heavily dependent on their peers, to guide them from knowledge to adoption. KR (2012, app. 1.2.5.1) explains; “I am not very good at reading the directions or following instructions, but if someone tells me verbally how to do it, then I will more readily do it”.

The fundamental characteristics of the Outsiders are thus; their lack of technological knowledge, the little time they dedicate to interacting online and their passive approach to seeking out, joining and using social media. Nevertheless, we do not make the same
conclusion as did Rogers (2003) that this group is always the *last* to join a medium. This is an important finding in our research, and will be discussed in greater detail later.

Further, the *Outsiders* value the considerable benefits they derive from the ease of communication permitted by social media, and thus are more open to new social media if they are lead to them by adept users in their personal networks. The ease in influencing the *Outsiders* ascertains them a good target for thought leaders of new social media.
4.2.2 The Wallflowers aka Group 2

Fig. 9 – The Wallflowers

4.2.2.1 Profile

Though knowledgeable and opinionated, the Wallflowers rarely voice themselves in an open and direct manner. They tend to stay on the periphery of social situations and are never at the forefront of conflict or discussion. While highly observant of their surroundings, they stay guarded in the way they share information and communicate with new people. However, the Wallflowers are very loyal once won.

4.2.2.2 Findings

The Wallflowers are predominantly Facebook users. They join solely for the purpose of communicating with friends. They do not create their own content, but will browse friends’ content and are likely to comment on, or like it. Whilst they might be present on content driven sites such as YouTube, they rarely use these in a social manner by
interacting with other users, and thus have little to no connections, on those sites. Therefore, they are unlikely to share social media sites with friends, as they engage only with a select few.

This group has no particular attachment to social media, however they do have strong opinions about the platforms they use, especially with regards to interface changes and updates, which they have a propensity to reject or highly dislike. The Wallflowers, while aware of privacy issues, are so limited in their usage of social media, that they rarely take the time to act upon any concerns. However, this hesitation on social media makes the Wallflowers unlikely to switch to a competing product, unless the entirety of their connections migrate and encourage them to follow.

The Wallflowers span all age groups and are often in non-IT related jobs. They predominantly use network driven media, however they may also use content driven sites for entertainment, without engaging in the communities on them.

4.2.2.3 The Wallflowers vs. the Late Majority
The closest equivalent to this group in Rogers’ (2003) typology, is the ‘Late majority’. Rogers (2003, p. 284) argues that these users “do not adopt until most others in their system have already done so.” According to Rogers (2003, p. 44), “the pressure of peers is necessary to motivate adoption,” within this group; further, Moore (2003, p. 44), who refers to them as ‘Conservatives’, argues that “they believe far more in tradition than in progress”. The same holds true for the Wallflowers, in that they do not join social media on their own volition. Rather they respond when a majority of their close connections having joined; motivating them to follow as they place considerable value on staying up to date and connected to their peers. The Wallflowers are not affected by ‘fads’ and they are therefore loyal towards social media products, as they are unlikely to seek out or switch to competitors. However, while loyal to the platforms they use, this is not transferred to social media in general; BC (2012, app. 1.2.4.1) expresses that “[social media] is not the be-all-end-all of my life” and there is not “anything that valuable in social media that I would be [willing] to pay sums of money for”.

When asked what is of importance when making the decision to join a medium, BC
(2012, app. 1.2.4.1) explains they will “wait to see if enough of [their] friends join it and if it’s worthwhile” – thus depending greatly on peers to justify joining. So, when Rogers (2003) explains that the ‘Late majority’ must feel no uncertainty to adopt, this can also be applied to the Wallflowers, as they demand the presence of their network to feel safe and perceive adequate need, to attempt adoption.

This lack of dedication, and indifference to social media is also reflected in the passive way these users communicate. “I am just seeing what people are doing and keeping myself up to date, rather than share trending topics or breaking news” explains one user (BC, 2012, app. 1.2.4.1). The Wallflowers are infrequently active on social media, as expressed by BT (2012, app. 1.2.4.2) who asserts that he only checks social media accounts, when there is a specific need or time allocated for it. Lastly, these users prefer viewing content of others rather than creating content of their own (BC, 2012, app. 1.2.4.1).

Whilst this group is extremely committed when they do adopt a new innovation, they can be incredibly “stubborn in their resistance to the call from the previous group of adopters to conform”. They tend only to commit to a new idea, towards the end of the product’s life cycle, when “products are extremely mature” (Moore, 2000, pp. 44-45). Moore (2000, p. 46) further explains that this group understands simple, single feature innovations best, and as they are slow to approach new innovations, they can be relied on after the ‘fad’ of an innovation has passed and other users might have moved on to newer, more revolutionary products.
4.2.3 The Cliques aka Group 3

Fig. 10 - The Cliques

4.2.3.1 Profile

The Cliques is very engaging and communicative, with the select individuals they surround themselves with. They depend greatly on interaction, but also provide significant value to their network. The Cliques has elitist tendencies, as they are reluctant in opening up to strangers and are careful not to divulge excessive amounts of information, to people outside their close network of friends.

4.2.3.2 Findings

Members of this group use at least two social media sites extensively; often Facebook and Twitter, which they have joined out of curiosity or because of friends. The Cliques are likely to possess up to six profiles that are not in use or which are used in a non-social way. Further, they tend to use Youtube for its content, but also have accounts on the professional network LinkedIn, though they do not engage within its communities.
The **Cliques** create their own content, predominantly in the form of statuses and pictures. They furthermore have a tendency to share content they find online and act upon prompts, they receive from social media, such as invitations or advertisements. Whilst this group will interact extensively with their large group of friends by browsing, commenting and liking their activity, they are also likely to periodically browse content produced by strangers, companies or celebrities. The heavy dependency on their network make them likely to actively convince friends to join sites, as they will never switch to or explore a new product, without the presence of their friends.

The **Cliques** have a strong attachment to social media, but are also aware of privacy issues and the fragility of their personal content, thus are likely to have adjusted their privacy settings.

The majority of **Cliques** is between the ages of 21 to 29. Most are students or have jobs that involve a moderate amount of computer-based work. They predominantly utilise network based media, but often find material to share on social platforms on either content or service driven sites; however, they do not engage within the existing communities on these.

4.2.3.3 The **Cliques** vs. the Early Majority

The middle group in our research known as the **Cliques**, is referred to by Rogers (2003) as the ‘Early majority’ and by Moore (2000) as the ‘Pragmatists’. While considered to be highly cautious in the face of risk, they still “**adopt new ideas just before the average member of a system**” (Rogers, 2003, p. 283). As they do not seek recognition for being early to adopt, they are likely to carefully consider a new idea, before taking what they regard as a risk to adopt (Rogers, 2003). Moore (2000, pp. 41-42) further states they are unlikely to communicate with people outside of their existing network and are thus a difficult group to gain the allegiance of.

Our research shows that members of the **Cliques** tend to possess little technological know-how; “**I pretty much stick to the basics, so unless it’s really easy to use and super helpful, I still hesitate to expand my horizon**” says WL (2012, app. 1.2.3.2). However, this lack of technological savviness does not reflect in the amount of time they spend on
their ‘favourite’ platforms. They rely heavily on frequent visits, even if brief, to ensure they stay at the forefront of any news related to their connections. The lack of technological skills are however reflected in the Cliques’ reluctance to join media if an existing network is not present; making their decision to try out a medium more complex and dependent on others. WL (2012, app. 1.2.3.2) states: “[if] I’m the only one on it, it’s obsolete”.

Like Moore’s (2000), this study also shows that the Cliques mainly communicate with people they already know and are thus unlikely to connect with strangers or people they are not somehow connected to, in the real world. Nevertheless, members of the Cliques are social by nature and as their network is their most important facet of social media, they actively create and maintain their network, making them likely to invite friends to a medium.

While careful and considerate (Rogers, 2003; Moore, 2000), the Cliques are highly private in the way they ensure that only close connections have access to their content online. However, they are also very loyal; making them unlikely to seek out competing products after becoming familiar with the interface of a medium. This reluctance also becomes apparent when changes in design and interface are likely to stimulate negative impressions of a product.
4.2.4 The Preps aka Group 4

Fig. 11 - The Preps

4.2.4.1 Profile
The Preps are social by nature, and very well connected to friends and professional contacts. They are skilled and knowledgeable, and use this knowledge to remain at the 'top of their class'; they are thus highly competitive.

4.2.4.2 Findings
The Preps are likely to have a substantial selection of social media accounts, on which they are often connected to a large network. They join social media sites on their own accord and often with the intention of connecting with new people. This differentiates them from the Cliques, as they are professional in their approach to social media and constantly on the looking for novel products to broaden their networks.
Interacting broadly with friends, strangers, companies and high profiled people, the Preps try out many new social media products but are unlikely to actively convince others to join. Rather, they receive gratification when trialling a new product, as they sharing their experience on other platforms, to portray themselves as adept and knowledgeable. They do so to enhance their image within particular communities they revere.

The Preps create their own unique content on most platforms on which they are active. They also share content they find online, and act upon things they see on social media. Their deep engagement on social media insinuates strong attachment.

Generally between the ages of 21-39, the Preps are often students or IT and marketing professionals. They have profiles on network, content and service based sites and are active on mobile services, that demand instant updates and frequent activity.

4.2.4.3 The Preps vs. the Early Adopters

The Preps can most easily be compared to the ‘Early adopters” (Rogers, 2003, p. 283); considered an important catalyst in the diffusion of an innovation. Moore (2000, p. 36) refers to these users as the ‘visionaries’, as they are willing to experiment with new products and will assign them the seal of approval, that the proceeding groups depend on. Both theorists (Rogers, 2003; Moore, 2000) define this group as driven by the quest to uncover fundamental breakthroughs and as they are respected by their peers, they can decrease uncertainty about a new idea (Moore, 2000, p. 33). Thus, according to these theorists, they have a high degree of opinion leadership (Rogers, 2003, p. 283).

While many of these traits are also apparent in the Preps, the results of this study show that the Preps do not actively try to convince others to join a medium, and thus they do not use their opinion leadership actively as argued by Rogers (2003) and Moore (2000). Having said that, the Preps still demand the presence of their networks to guarantee continued use (as do the other groups), but are not discouraged to remain active in the interim of waiting for others to join. They believe that “if the platform is [...] interesting, then [their] kind of people will migrate towards it” (ER, 2012, app. 1.2.2.1). The Preps can, through open and active use of new platforms, unintentionally be deemed opinion
leaders to recipients of their ‘passive advertisement’. They are open about their communication and lack any reluctance in sharing content to the public space, however, this is not in an effort to recruit others to join (ER, 2012, app. 1.2.2.1). They simply thrive off the novelty and ability to satisfy needs unmet by existing technology and easily accept new innovations.
4.2.5 The Nerds aka Group 5

Fig. 12 - The Nerds

4.2.5.1 Profile

The Nerds often isolate themselves from other groups, by only interacting with other Nerds. Amongst one another, they feel comfortable in opening up and sharing ideas and will express their innovative character in a protected, closed and safe environment of like-minded individuals. They are curious by nature, and combined with their talent and knowledge, they aim to build prestige and status within their network.

4.2.5.2 Findings

The Nerds have accounts on a vast amount of social networks, though many are inactive or rarely used. However, they will extensively use up to five accounts on a daily basis, on which they are widely connected and interact with friends, strangers, companies and high-profiled people. While the Nerds create content on all platforms on which they are
active, and often share content across them, the novelty and quality of the content they create is carefully considered prior to sharing. They are highly aware of the impact their communications can have on their digital identity.

Further, while the Nerds are likely to join new networks, they rarely invite friends to join them unless they are convinced the new medium will be sustainable and successful. New social media sites are therefore also scrutinised by these users, in a professional and organised manner, before being put into use. As these users are frequently exposed to new social media, they are highly aware of competing products and are likely to try them out, if they offer a service of superior, technical quality. While the Nerds approach social media in a professional manner and are only moderately attached to it, their engagement is of high-emotional quality, because of the importance they assign to their image in order to gain the respect of others.

Due to their extensive knowledge of social media, these users are aware of privacy issues and comfortable taking any necessary measures to secure their profiles. While they do not worry about privacy, they rather embrace the advantages online communication enables.

The Nerds are between the age of 21-29 and employed in technology or IT related jobs; they often work for companies producing social media sites or for firms that produce a web-based product. These users have profiles on network, content, service and mobile drives sites.

4.2.5.3 The Nerds vs. the Innovators

Rogers (2003, pp. 282-283) identifies these ‘technology adept’ users as part of the ‘Innovators’, perhaps even better explained by Moore (2000, p. 28) as ‘technology enthusiast[s]’. However, despite their different titles, they both regard these innovative adopters as venturesome, with a great interest in new ideas and technology. These qualities also make this the first group to adopt, as they are driven by curiosity and therefore “the ones who first appreciate the architecture of your product”; whilst they are forgiving of slow performance and lack of functionality (Moore, 2000, p. 29). According to Rogers (2003, p. 283), these users are not highly respected by the other
user groups and thus do not have a great ability, to persuade others to adopt a product. However, Rogers (2003) regards them as critical carriers to bring a new product into the adoption ‘system’.

The Nerds are also highly venturesome and will try new technology for the sake of it, preferably early on in the product life-cycle. JA (2012, app. 1.2.1.1) explains: “If I think that [a social media] might be useful, I’ll sign up and try it out”. This approach is further supported by AR (2012, app. 1.2.1.2), whose curiosity is enough for them to “sign up for so many new services every week”. Yet the Nerds are not natural leaders, as their consumption is generally based on testing, rather than full use and adoption. The Nerds are often invited as beta-testers on various new social media platforms and thus a proportion of their accounts are likely a result of their involvement with the industry. When discussing new innovations amongst other Nerds, these users often form exclusive clusters. This can also explain why these users are so conscientious of how their online communications impact their image, as this often defines their status amongst their fellow Nerds.

Lastly, while Rogers (2003, p. 282) believes the ‘innovators’ curious nature drives them “out of their peer networks” to experiment with new social media, the Nerds are dependent on their peers, as continued use will not persist, unless they are eventually joined by their network. For JA (2012, app. 1.2.1.1) personal adoption of social media “is really dependent on the social side of it” and “adoption in [their] network”. They also go on to explain, that a social medium can instantly become part of their routine, if their network is already active upon it.
5.0 DISCUSSION
We acknowledge that the reader may perceive some repetition throughout the discussion. This is a consequence of the vital element of interrelation, that is naturally inherent in all the discussion points in this thesis. Further, it represents the interdependence of the elements in social media. To provide clarity for the reader, and to generate a sense of continuity, we summarise primary and fundamental findings throughout the discussion, hereby identified as ‘generalisations’.

5.1 ADOPTION AND THE DECISION PROCESS

Rogers (2003, p. 21) defines adoption as the ‘decision to make full use of an innovation’; though he acknowledges that adoption is not an instantaneous act, but rather a process of actions (2003, p. 169), the nature of his theory and the bell-curve still demands that the conclusion to this process, be it adoption or rejection, can be connected to a specific moment in time defined by the individual’s actions. However, there are conflicting messages and lack of clarity that pinpoint precisely what Roger constitutes as a user making full use of an innovation. Whilst he acknowledges that the innovation needs to be put into use by the adopter and not simply purchased, it is not clearly defined to what extent, or for how long, this consistent usage must persist to constitute adoption.

This ambiguity complicates the application of Roger’s theory to social media, as it becomes clear that the actions carried out by the adopter and even more so, the intentions underlying these, can not be as clearly defined as with a traditional, physical product. To gain further insight into this issue, we turn to another closely related industry: the
service industry.

One can argue that social media is a hybrid between a service and a product; while product-like elements are important, the medium on which it is consumed also deems social media an intangible service and experience. This means that the quality of a social medium, for the individual user, cannot be evaluated before the product has been put into use or the service has begun (Normann, 1991, p. 17). Furthermore, this means that the user is not merely a consumer, but is rather a participant and the perception of quality is thus appreciated on an individual basis. Thus it becomes difficult to pinpoint at what point adoption takes place. Regard for this is fundamentally unaccounted for in Rogers’ (2003) diffusion theory, largely due to the nature of the products used in the theory’s creation.

A further factor that makes the identification of adoption difficult, is the lack of adoption barriers. The products employed in both Rogers’ (2003) and Moore’s (2000) diffusion theories are often restricted by extensive adoption barriers, mainly cost, but further aspects such as the practicalities including the seeking out, purchasing and transporting of the product in question, can affect adoption. Yet in the case of social media, these restrictions are to a large extent abolished as the products are available through online channels; a channel that all potential adopters have access to and easily make use of on a regular basis. However, one must also acknowledge that an exchange of data takes place at the point of sign-up, as the user hands over personal details to be able to set up their account. For the sake of comparison, we thus acknowledge the point of purchase of a product in Rogers’ theory, as equivalent to the decision to sign-up and create an account on a social medium.

The decision process is thus defined by ease and the lack of risk and monetary cost (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). This means it is a much faster and fluid process in comparison to that outlined by Rogers (2003, p. 169), where extensive steps must be carried out by adopters, even before arriving at the point of sale. Consequently, anyone can ‘enter the process’ by creating an account at any point in time. Thus, while the number of signups for a medium can act as an accelerator for new signups or to attract investment, this number does not necessitate true representation of actual adopters, as it fails to acknowledge the difference between inactive and active accounts. The action of signing up can
therefore not be defined as a final commitment to the product, and thus the main
difference between the adoption process in social media versus that of Rogers (2003)
becomes evident.

Generalisation 1:
Adoption can not be defined based on a perceivable action by the adopter carried out at a
specific point in time.

5.1.1 Rogers’ Innovation-decision Process
To fully understand the concept of adoption one must also understand the series of steps
leading up to it. The innovation-decision process by Rogers (2003, p. 20) is explained as
‘the process through which an individual go from first knowledge to implementation’, and
consists of five stages; 1) Knowledge; 2) Persuasion; 3) Decision; 4) Implementation and
ultimately 5) Confirmation; the final decision to adopt or reject.

This process in many ways resembles the one we have uncovered. However, whilst Rogers
(2003) perceives the moment of adoption as the conclusion to the decision process (and
thus the point where the adopter becomes of greatest value to a company), we recognise
that this point can not be as easily defined in social media. Our research shows that
25% of the accounts owned by the users in our study are never used or only used yearly
(Table 14, p. 57). Users are therefore highly likely to create accounts on mediums on
which they will never return, and all accounts created can thus not be accounted for as
bringing equal value to a social media company.

Corrocher (2011, p. 548) supports this idea; ‘Investigating the intensity of usage is
particularly important in this context, because it allows gauging some hints on the
economic viability of the services, insofar as the associated revenues are increased by a
more intensive usage. For example, more banners are likely to be clicked and more
applications/products are likely to be purchased.’ As social media is much like a service
or experience product, it is difficult for users to evaluate the product before actually
putting it into use (Corrocher, 2011). Unlike in Rogers (2003, p. 169) theory, where “an
individual (or other decision making unit) engages in activities that lead to a choice to
adopt or reject the innovation”, the ‘acquiring’ of the product (in this case creating an
account) happens before the user can properly assess and evaluate the quality of the
product. Although one would rarely encounter a customer spending money on a physical product, without the intention to unpack, utilise, or consume it, this is exactly what social media users do on a frequent basis. Given the ease, lack of commitment and minimal effort involved in gaining access to a social media product, social media can be acquired frivolously compared to the products presented in Rogers’ (2003) theory. For this reason we acknowledge a difference in the decision process of a social media user, compared to that of a potential adopter in Rogers’ (2003) theory;

Generalisation 2:
The innovation-decision process for social media users does not mimic that of Rogers (2003).

5.1.2 The new innovation-decision process
Consequently, we introduce a new stage in the decision process, where the user has signed up for a platform, but not yet adopted it. We thus suggest an amendment to Rogers’ (2003, p. 170) innovation-decision process with the addition of trial.

Fig. 13 - Social media decision process

Whilst Rogers (2003, pp. 177-78) argues that adoption takes place at a point in the decision process, a user adopting a social medium will experience this in a much more fluid and undefinable way. So, during the trial stage, which replaces Rogers’ (2003, p. 169) decision and implementation stages, adoption of a social media can occur.

5.1.2.1 Knowledge
Knowledge is the stage within which the individual user becomes aware of an innovation, how it works and how to use it. This stage can be either passive or active; passive, when the potential user is exposed to an innovation by accident or coincidence; and active, when a user gains insight through a behaviour or action they have initiated themselves (Rogers, 2003, pp. 171-172).
However, in the case of social media, users can sign up to a medium prompted by an invitation sent by another user, allowing the new user to create their profile immediately. If this happens, a user can essentially bypass the knowledge stage entirely, as the invitation becomes a means of persuasion and possibly even implementation. This can be especially effective for those users who are unlikely to explore a platform on their own accord, and can simultaneously entice them by clearly showing the presence of their friends on the platform. This approach is highly common given the sign-up flow of most social media platforms, whereby a new user is encouraged to send invitations to contacts, immediately after signing up.

A user’s participation in the knowledge stage does not necessitate their graduation to the following stages and even if they advance, this can take a considerable amount of time. Many of the interviewees in our research, express that they are aware of an extensive amount of the platforms proposed in our questionnaire. However, they have no further opinion about the products or intention to sign up; thus they have never left the knowledge phase for those specific products. The same hold true for every participant enlisted in our attempted Pinterest case study, as they express awareness of the platform, yet have not pursued it further.

A lack of perception of value, especially by the less advanced groups, can be due to selective exposure and perception, as presented by Rogers (2003, p. 171). Here it is argued, that due to lack of comparison, users with no point of reference or knowledge of the specific subject, are likely to dismiss information about it or fail to acknowledge its importance. This is especially problematic when a user communicates with someone from another group, as they may not understand the value of the product as explained by someone who is more technologically adept. Our study confirms that this problem is often prevalent within the Outsiders, given that these users rely solely on their network to inform them and guide them through the initial steps of the decision process. This insufficient technological appreciation is additionally reflected by the Outsiders, in their absence of a perceived need; their need for social media is only recognised when presented with the solution and its application.

5.1.2.1a The groups in the knowledge stage

For the Outsiders, the knowledge stage is defined by existing users of the platform
(typically from more advanced groups) educating them about the new medium. Due to their lack of technical proficiency, these users rely solely on others to decode and relay the value, that is relevant in their situation.

The *Wallflowers* also depend highly on existing connections in the knowledge stage. However, their knowledge typically only progresses them further in the innovation decision process after, they experience a fear of missing out, stimulated by the majority of persons in their network having already joined.

The *Cliques* are slightly more perceptive in the knowledge stage, largely from their stronger understanding of technology. Nevertheless, like the *Wallflowers*, they depend highly on the majority of their friends having joined, before they feel pressured to leave the knowledge stage.

Our results show that the *Preps* and *Nerds* are considerably more likely to be active participants in this process; either by consciously seeking out new products or by purposely being connected to and following people who can expose them to these products.

For social media companies, this means that the *Preps*, and in particular the *Nerds*, are far easier to reach, as these users demand far fewer marketing efforts to generate awareness of a product. The mere novelty of a new social medium is adequate incentive in itself for the *Preps* and *Nerds*, whilst the *Outsiders*, *Wallflowers* and *Cliques* are far more dependent on existing users and the transmission of their experience to motivate departure from the knowledge into the persuasion stage. The *Preps* and *Nerds* are therefore active in the knowledge stage, whilst the *Outsiders*, *Wallflowers* and *Cliques* are passive.

5.1.2.1b Knowledge summary

**Generalisation 3:**
The *Outsiders* are very slow to enter, explore and depart the knowledge stage.

**Generalisation 4:**
The *Wallflowers* and the *Clique* are fairly quick at entering the knowledge stage, slower at exploring and very slow at departing it.
Generalisation 5:
The Preps and the Nerds are quick to enter, explore and depart the knowledge stage.

5.1.2.2 Persuasion
This is the stage in which the potential user forms a favorable or unfavorable opinion about the product in question. Rogers (2003, p. 175) argues that this opinion is created by the user actively seeking out information about the product from peers or mass media. According to Rogers, this is a rather enduring stage in the formation of a user’s beliefs, making it all the more critical to ensure that a user be subjected to messages, that support a positive representation of the product, thus making its adoption more likely. However, our research shows that this process is often non-existent or imperceptible for most groups.

5.1.2.2a The groups in the persuasion stage
It is difficult to differentiate at what point a user from the Outsiders progresses from the knowledge to the persuasion stage. As these users will never find a social medium on their own and rely solely on peers to inform them about the products, persuasion often happens simultaneously with the knowledge stage. Due to their passive approach and reluctance towards social media, the Outsiders will never be thought-leaders, nor will they try to adopt early or persuade those around them. Rather, they depend on other individuals, often those who are close to them in real life (KR, 2012, app. 1.2.5.1).

Generalisation 6:
The Outsiders are not thought-leaders and persuasion is thus reliant on members of other groups.

The Wallflowers are generally reluctant in their approach to social media, in particular with respect to privacy and are thus likely to spend a great deal of time in the persuasion stage, actively seeking out information. Two interviewees explain the deliberation they experience in the face of a new social medium; ‘I would read one of two newspaper articles about it, and then decide if I want to join or not’ (BT, 2012, app. 1.2.4.2) and ‘I was aware of [Foursquare] for a very long time, but almost resisted it. I wasn’t sure why I should use it [...] I guess I wait to see if enough of my friends join it and if it’s worthwhile’ (BC, 2012, app. 1.2.4.1). The most valuable information the Wallflowers gather,
allow them to make the required assessment as to whether enough of their friends are actively engaging on the platform, in order to join. Thus, unlike the Outsiders, who depend on specific individuals to convince and guide them, the Wallflowers are influenced by the masses and will follow where the majority of their ‘real-world’ connections go.

**Generalisation 7:**
The Wallflowers rely on the decision of the majority of their connections in the persuasion stage.

The Cliques are to some extent similar to the Wallflowers, given the high priority they place on the presence of their network. As they mostly interact with people they already know, it is important to them that their friends are present on the same platforms. However, the Cliques are more likely than the Wallflowers to take a ‘chance’ on a product and attempt to convince their friends to follow. So, as the Cliques are likely to go through the persuasion stage sooner than some other groups, they are often an important part of the majority, that will later persuade the Wallflowers to follow. Should the Cliques fail to convince or find peers on a medium in this stage, they are likely to fail to adopt it.

**Generalisation 8:**
The Cliques rely on the majority of their connections being on a medium and are likely to be the persuader of others within their network.

Lastly, although the Preps and Nerds possess very different traits, both go through the persuasion stage very rapidly. Whilst the Preps will often turn to the Nerds for platforms to join, they are likely to begin using a service quickly and independent from the majority of others in their close network. This is an attempt to participate in the discussions happening within the Nerds’ community in order to enhance their image (ER, 2012, app.1.2.2.1).

The Nerds take a minimal amount of time to progress through the persuasion stage, as their curiosity instantly leads them to sign up, especially should they hear about a medium through one of their fellow Nerds. This is to ensure that they are a first mover on the platform; PL (2012, app. 1.1.2.2 ) explains: ‘[if] a lot of people [are] talking about
it and trying it out, I want to be one of the earlier people to pick it up and try it out’. Additionally, these users are likely to consult their network when hearing about a product, often by using other social media platforms (mostly Twitter), to measure how much attention and momentum a new product is gaining. Another interviewee explains how quickly the decision process happens: ‘if they have a serviced sign-in tool, where you can sign in with Twitter or Facebook, I don’t really hesitate to click that button’ (AR, 2012, app. 1.2.1.2).

Generalisation 9:

Both the Preps and Nerds require minimal persuasion and are likely to sign up for a medium based only on their own curiosity.

Rogers (2003, p. 176) argues that the formation of a favorable or unfavourable opinion towards a product does not determine whether it will be adopted or rejected; this is the ‘KAP-gap’. This trend is apparent in some, but not all, of the user groups in our research. The Nerds, and to a certain extent the Preps, will often sign up for a medium, even if they have formed an unfavorable opinion (AR, 2012, app. 1.2.1.2), due to their strong curiosity and technical interest. However, the Wallflowers in particular, and at times the Cliques, often halt in this stage despite intentions to join. Several of the respondents explained that they intended to sign up for a social media platform, but ‘had not gotten around to it’ (NC, 2012, app. 1.2.3.1).

Rogers (2003, p. 176) asserts that this gap can be overcome, if a user is regularly exposed to cues-to-action. However, not all cues can be regarded as having the same effect on a user, and user groups vary in their responsiveness. On social media, Rogers’ (2003) assertion is somewhat true, as notifications and reminders can better the chances of continuous usage. However, the pressure from the potential adopters’ network is much more effective, due to the ‘fear of missing out’ on the social events and communications occurring on the medium. These cues might be as direct as an actual invitation to a platform from a friend; this method taps into effect friends have, and is frequently used

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1 KAP: Knowledge, attitude, practice
by social media companies. With this direct approach, a potential adopter might entirely skip the knowledge stage and possibly the persuasion stage too, as discussed earlier.

**Generalisation 10:**
A user's existing social network is the most powerful attractor in the persuasion stage.

### 5.1.2.2b Persuasion summary

**Generalisation 11:**
The *Outsiders* often enter the persuasion stage while simultaneously entering the knowledge stage.

**Generalisation 12:**
The *Wallflowers* and often the *Cliques* frequently become caught in the persuasion stage, unless they experience cues from their network.

**Generalisation 13:**
The *Preps*, and especially the *Nerds*, enter, explore and exit the persuasion stage very rapidly.

### 5.1.2.3 Sign up

Though there are no financial barriers when signing up for social media, an exchange of information takes place. Sign-up requires that users divulge personal data to gain access to a medium, as this information is what makes a medium social and allow users to connect with existing friends or relevant strangers. The exchange of personal details can therefore to some extent be considered equivalent to a financial trade, as information is exchanged to gain access to the medium.

In our study, most people value a sum of money more highly than they do their privacy. This does however vary within the diverse social media user groups. The *Nerds* in particular, and to a large extent the *Preps*, have little reservation about this. They understand the potential privacy issues such an exchange can ensue, but also have the knowledge to take the necessary steps to prevent them. This contributes to the accelerated speed at which they move through the decision process (PL, 2012, app. 1.1.2.2). Having
said that, the Clique, Wallflowers and Outsiders have a tendency of being more concerned about this exchange, which explains their reluctance and slower rate of moving through the decision process. Interviewee BC (2012, app. 1.2.4.1 ) explains: ‘I think I am getting a bit more paranoid about it now, and I don’t like signing up for new stuff all the time and giving my email address out everywhere’.

Whilst the exchange of privacy can invoke reluctance for some groups, it does not prove to deter in the same way a monetary exchange can. The exchange of privacy can thus delay some user groups from joining, but there is no single group that is dissuaded entirely from the collateral. We therefore conclude that the act of signing up for a social medium is in itself, a rather insignificant stage in the decision process.

5.1.2.4 Trial

Rogers (2003, pp. 177-80) claims that the persuasion stage is naturally followed by the decision and implementation stages, in which the user decides to utilise and thereby adopt a product. Our research however, shows a much more inconsistent process.

Social media products are built so that sign-up is both fast and easy, often by the click of button. As these sites often require an account before a user can access any of the existing content, a user’s natural and most frequent next step to uncover more information, is to create an account almost instantaneously - even if it is not their intention to put the product into active use.

We therefore suggest that a user can not commence usage of social media platform, without entering into a trial stage. Regardless of their intent and willingness to engage with the product, it is not before the user has learned how the site works, which friends are already present and if the product can provide them with value, that they can finally decide if they want to continue use. JA (2012, app. 1.2.1.1) explains that he is quick to sign up for new platforms, as ‘you won’t get much out of the public website [...] It’s next to impossible to know what it does from the marketing bull****’. Thus, creating an account on a social media site can not be regarded as ‘implementation’, but rather an action to enable evaluation by trialling the product.

The concept of trial is not absent in the original diffusion theory. However, Rogers (2003,
p. 258) discerns ‘trialability’ as a perceived attribute, that can encourage a user to adopt; this provides a chance for the adopter to assign meaning to the innovation, while learning how it can be implemented and used. We, on the other hand, regard trial as a stage in the innovation-decision process. As we argue that the nature and design of social media creates a process in which the user must go through a trial, it can not be perceived as an exclusive attribute only applicable to some products. This concept is also apparent in the earlier referenced service industry (Normann, 1991) where a user’s own assessment of the product will overrule any marketing efforts the company can implement. Furthermore, when looking at the frequency of use for the platforms in our study (Table 14, p. 57), we see that a large proportion of accounts remain unused or are only used rarely. This concludes that signing up, or ‘implementing’, does not necessitate usage or adoption, and thereby confirms the need for a new stage in the decision process;

Generalisation 14:
All users enter a stage of trial upon signing up for a social media product.

5.1.2.4a Networks in trial
As we have concluded the initial stages in the decision process are fairly insubstantial for most user groups, the trial stage becomes the most significant and crucial stage, as it is quick to progress to, but difficult and demanding to successfully complete.

In addition to the need for a social group to interact with, two other factors, related to the user’s network, affect their likelihood to continue use. 1) If the user has a large amount of connections on a medium, it is more likely that automatic prompts will be sent, when relevant activity has taken place. These notifications function not only as reminders of the medium’s existence, but also as indicators that the user’s connections are active on the platform; thus encouraging further use and engagement, by the trialling user. 2) Furthermore, as a user’s network is responsible for creating relevant content for the individual to interact with, the presence of these content creators is essential, as the product will otherwise be empty. As the user is motivated to interact with content, they

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2 Perceived attributes: Characteristics of a product as perceived by the individual, affecting the rate at which an adoption takes place (Rogers, 2003, p. 15).
will learn more about the tools functions and features, and in doing so will derive further reward and gratification from use. With an increase in activity users are less likely to reject a platform, even if the rejection is due to simply forgetting to use the service. Thus we can conclude that the trial process is heavily influenced by one’s peers not only online, but also offline.

**Generalisation 15:**

The greater the presence of a user’s network during trial, the lesser chance of rejection.

5.1.2.4b The groups in the trial stage

The trial stage is particularly challenging for the *Outsiders* to overcome. While these users are challenged in becoming aware of new mediums and in perceiving any relevance, they struggle even more so to actually commence use. So, as with the other stages in the decision process, the *Outsiders* rely heavily on their close peers in this stage. As these users only connect with people they know offline, it is essential exactly *who*, and not just how many users are present on a new medium. In the trial stage, the *Outsiders* depend on their connections for encouragement and content (as is the case with most other groups), but they also rely on them for technical support and guidance. If they fail to receive this guidance, it is likely they will abandon a product, as they simply do not understand how it works.

The *Wallflowers’* dependency on their network is different. They do not depend on social media in their daily life, and are thus only likely to join a platform when the vast amount of their friends have proved that it is worth their while. They are therefore more motivated by the possibility of being left out, than they are with actively engaging with, and consuming content.

The *Cliques* are motivated purely by the communal aspect of social media. Friends presence and activity take precedence in the trial stage, and features, product quality and design are not considered as important. Though this group might experiment occasionally with new media, they ultimately depend on the opportunity to connect with their offline contacts during the trial. WE (2012, app. 1.2.3.2) remarks that “it makes a big difference if you have friends using it”. The *Cliques* are thus highly likely to attempt persuading friends to join them during the trial stage, in an effort to generate a greater
appeal. They must succeed at this in order to make continuous usage both plausible and attractive.

A member of the Preps argues that the presence of a community enhances the attractiveness of a medium in the trial stage (ER, 2012, app. 1.2.2.1). However, a number of other factors affect how positive this stage is for a user. The Preps are likely to evaluate exactly what value a new medium can generate, and may assess how well the platform will enhance them professionally, or broaden their current network. These users are much more patient in the trial stage, and likely to spend some time actively using the medium before casting their judgement.

The Nerds derive pleasure from a new medium during the trial. While highly curious about the architecture and functionality of a new site, they will sign up with the intention to trial so to learn about a new service. According to JA (2012, 1.2.1.1), provided he ‘thought it might be useful, [then he’d] sign up and try it out.’ Their critical eye and extensive knowledge on technology however, makes them difficult to win over or even remotely impress, and it is likely they will explore competitors and abandon a product instantly should they find a better alternative.

It becomes apparent that the Nerds’ and the Preps’ evaluation differ in that of the three other groups. Whilst the presence of a community is as essential for these groups as the less adept, these two advanced user groups always evaluate social media as a product. Due to the Nerds technological knowledge and the Preps professional approach to the media, they are both likely to place a greater emphasis on the functionality and idea of the product, rather than solely its social aspects. The extent of value that a medium will provide the Preps, and especially the Nerds, is significant. Due to their extreme presence on social media, they may lack a need for new social tools, but driven by curiosity, will likely experiment with unique new social media.

5.1.2.4c Trial summary

Generalisation 16:
The Outsiders depend on close connections to help them through the technical aspects of the trial.
Generalisation 17:
The *Wallflowers* depend on the masses' presence in the trial stage, and are thus late to enter. They do not care about design or functionality.

Generalisation 18:
The *Clique* require their offline network to be present, and thus will work at convincing them to join a platform to enhance their own experience in the trial.

Generalisation 19:
The *Preps* evaluate products during the trial, based on the value they can derive. They are not timid when developing new connections online.

Generalisation 20:
For the *Nerds*, trial in itself is an attraction; they are experts in evaluating, and highly critical in their assessment.

5.1.2.5 Adoption
Rogers (2003) identifies adoption as the point ‘*at which an adopter puts a product into use*’; with a traditional, physical product, this would be assumed to be at or close to the point of purchase. However, in the case of social media, and with the introduction of the trial stage, the point of adoption cannot be so easily defined. Not only are there a series of layers in both behaviour and activity; such as browsing, creating content and engaging with other users, that must be accounted for. Moreover, the introduction of the trial also proves, that merely putting a product into use does not constitute full adoption, as usage is often constrained to a short period, and not only determined by the user itself, but also by the behaviour of the user’s network.

5.1.2.5a Adoption of interactive products
In the case of interactive products, a user cannot gain value if they are the only user with an account; the reason being, there will be no other users with whom to interact. The magnitude ensued from the presence of others, became evident when analysing
patterns and opinions from our questionnaires. As argued by Markus (1987, p. 506), one cannot measure a user’s true attitude and behavioural predisposition towards a product, before universal access has been achieved, because only then can a user reach all members of their community upon it. Thus, only at the point of universal access does an interactive product truly perform and create the intended value for the individual user, making it possible for them to decide if they want to continue their use.

Whilst Markus’ (1987) theory applies well to technology with a physical component or those where various versions of an innovation can work together, social media presents a unique set of problems:

- There is no physical component for the user to acquire a sense of attachment;
- Users can only communicate with another individual on a particular social platform under the condition they are using the same site.

The users who opt for an alternative medium can become isolated from their network and are likely to discontinue use, leaving the platform behind and migrating to the widely adopted alternative. For this reason, a substantial enough mass of individuals must adopt a product fairly simultaneously, before it can deliver any value and utility for the average user. Steinfeld (1986) argues that ‘the benefits to an individual from using an interactive medium appear proportional to the number of medium users with whom the individual communicates’. This is the concept of positive externalities (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010, p. 449); ‘the benefit to you from a social networking site is directly related to the total number of people who use the site’. To fully understand this concept in social media and in relation to the adoption process, we present the decision process graphically;

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3 Such as different email providers still allowing for communication in between.
Fig. 14 - The social media innovation-decision process

The starting point of the decision process is fluid; as a result, it does not necessarily begin at the same point for each of the groups or the existing members within. This process incorporates a wide variety of factors, that gradually crystallise and solidify the user's experience and opinions, as they move further towards adoption. It also becomes clear how the various groups move through the decision process at varying speeds. However, all groups benefit from the positive value they derive from their network's presence.

We can therefore conclude that the more people who enter the stage of trial, and thereby become part of the various communities that the individual user can interact with, the lesser the risk of discontinuance. It is this ‘bandwagon’ effect that is the foundation for the fertile environment required for further adoption and user-base growth to persist. The emphasis on community in adoption is also clearly visible in our interview results. When asked what aspects of a social media service are most important, BT (2012, app. 1.2.4.2) responds: 'Definitely how many people I know on that network or social media page and apart from that, not really that much’. The interviewee goes on to explain that they are more likely to choose a service that has poor functionality, yet where their networks are present, over a service with good functionality, but with fewer community members. Though the Nerds have proven independent when signing up for a social media service, the existence of their community or network is as essential for their continued use of a product, as is the case with the lesser adept groups. When asked at what point
a social media service becomes integrated in their online routine, JA (2012, app. 1.2.1.1) explains that; “It might take a year for my friends to join, and that’s where it will become very useful for me. [...] So it’s really dependent on the social side of it”.

5.1.2.5b Definition of adoption of social media

Therefore, we deduce that a user can only gain the full benefits of a social medium when their network is present, at which point adoption can occur.

**Generalisation 21:**

Adoption evolves as a community process.

To define adoption, we depart from Rogers definition of ‘when an adopter puts a product into use’. Based on our findings we therefore extend the definition to accommodate social media adoption:

‘when consensus to use a specific medium is achieved within an adequate representation of connections, resulting in the individual user achieving benefits from the medium that they could not achieve before a community was present.’

Through this definition we acknowledge that adoption of social media does not occur at a particular point in time, but is rather a fluid process that occurs during the various user groups’ trial. As people communicate both about and upon the platform, a community is gradually built through the users’ activity. When the user-base has reached a threshold, substantial enough to justify use and give an incentive to stay present on the platform, users are less likely to cease use or seek alternatives; thus adoption transpires.

It also becomes apparent, that adoption of social media is subjective compared to the adoption process pertaining to the products used in Rogers’ (2003) theory. For social media products, adoption is not necessarily a decision made by everyone online. It is rather a sense, perceived by the individual when specific networks and communities are made accessible to them. When a user gets a sense of belonging to a community and thereby gains value from the social media product, that they would not have achieved otherwise, adoption for that user has happened.
Should an adequate amount of one’s network fail to actively participate on a social medium, users will fail to derive the value that can motivate them to continue use; this becomes a stimulus for active or passive rejection of the medium.

5.1.2.6 The rejection stage
Rogers (2003) argues the ‘implementation’ stage is followed by ‘confirmation’; the stage in which the individual adopter can reverse their decision to adopt and thus discontinue use. However, as with adoption, we suggest that an individual’s rejection of a social medium occurs as a consequence of other users’ reactions or lack thereof to the medium. The decision process undertaken by other users can degrade a platform’s perceived value, resulting in a stage in which individuals may actively or passively reject a social medium. Our research shows that a user rarely rejects a social medium, unless their network does. This can occur during the trial stage before communal adoption subsists, or after a product has been adopted by the majority of their connections. On the basis of this, we present the four types of social media rejection:

*Fig. 15 - Social media rejection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-adoption</td>
<td>Very common</td>
<td>Very rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-adoption</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.2.6a Active rejection
Active rejection, involving the user actively deleting their account on a social medium, is rare. None of the interviewees in this study indicate they have actively deleted an account. KR (2012, app. 1.2.5.1) explains that she would “probably consider adding [accounts], rather than deleting,” while JA (2012, app. 1.2.1.1) expresses that he will rarely deactivate an account, but will rather fail to return.

Typically, social media providers make account deletion difficult, by hiding the “delete
account” feature in an effort to dissuade users from terminating their accounts. If a company can maintain a user’s account, regardless of a lack of activity, the high number of registered user act as leverage when attracting investment and advertising revenue. However, this figure of accounts fails to acknowledge the most vital representation of a social medium’s subsistence; users’ ongoing activity.

We therefore conclude that active pre-adoption rejection is rare. This happens when users decide to actively delete or deactivate their account on a social media service, that has yet to be communally adopted. Often early users will keep their accounts on sites that have not yet gained a sufficient community, in case this will happen in the future.

Active post-adoption rejection, depends on a user deciding to actively delete or deactivate their account on a social medium, after the community has adopted. This occurs even more rarely, than does pre-adoption rejection. The likely reason for this is, that such action will exclude the user from the existing value gained from access to a community. However, if carried out, such rejection can be interpreted as a statement of the user wishing to differentiate themselves from the masses or to provoke a reaction. If the masses decide to delete accounts post-adoption, it is often because they have already migrated to other services, and want to protect their privacy on desolate platforms.

Generalisation 22:
Active rejection of a social medium is rare.

5.1.2.6b Passive rejection
Passive rejection is common, as users are likely to forget about a social medium if they do not receive notifications or prompts. In the early stages, when a user has not formed a strong attachment to a social medium, visiting it is neither second-nature nor routine; thus passive pre-adoption rejection can occur. This is when the user discontinues use of a social media platform, without deleting or deactivating their account, before communal adoption has taken place. This is the most common type of rejection we have identified and can happen any number of times during the trial stage, if the user makes continuous attempts to implement the medium.

Passive post-adoption rejection is not as common, but can still transpire. For social media
that has reached critical mass, such as Facebook, users typically log in to their accounts multiple times per day, to access activity in real-time. Due to this habitual behaviour, users are very unlikely to passively reject a product that has become ingrained into their daily routine. However, this type of rejection can become more common in the community over a longer period of time, if users gradually migrate to other platforms.

Case 1 – Myspace

MySpace was launched in 2003 by eUniverse, who operated a series of community-based websites that collectively engaged 18.5 million daily, active users (Evans & Schmalensee, 2010, p. 8). Two months after launch, MySpace obtained 4-6000 daily sign-ups and dominated the social network market by the age of five with 56 million users (Evans & Schmalensee, 2010, p. 6). MySpace remained strong, until Facebook entered the market in 2008 and took over the role as the leading social network, through a long-term mass migration. Despite several rebranding attempts (Hulpoch, 2012), Facebook left a stark MySpace climate that is now dominated by US female youth (ages 15-17) and temporary and sporadic users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 2321). While perusing MySpace profiles today, one will encounter a huge amount of abandoned, undeleted and idle accounts.

Generalisation 23

Passive rejection of a social medium is common.

5.1.2.6c Reasons for rejection

Based on our findings and the above discussion, we have found three primary reasons that can result in one of the four types of social media rejection. In no particular order, the reasons for discontinuance most identified by our respondents, are;

- Lack of **network**
- Lack of **content** and thus utility
- Forgetfulness due to lack of **activity**
 Whilst any of these can be a cause for discontinuance in their own right, they are all closely connected. The lack of network is likely to occur because the user’s network has yet to join, or due to their network having migrated to an alternative. However, as the user gain value and utility from a product when their network is present, the lack of network can be a direct cause for absence of content and utility; ultimately leading the user to reject the product. Few prompts induced by a lack of activity, can further contribute to a user’s failure to return to a platform.

Generalisation 24:

Rejection of a social medium is mostly a result of the absence of network, content or activity relevant to the individual user.

Subsequently, to understand how the adoption patterns and behaviour of social media users differ from those in Rogers’ (2003) theory, we address the effect that the three concepts of 1) Activity, 2) Network, and 3) Content have on social media users.

5.2 ACTIVITY, NETWORK AND CONTENT

5.2.1 Activity

According to Cowles (1989, p. 83) the internet and other new media “possess attributes not possessed by the traditional media, in particular interactivity”, defined by Markus (1987, p. 492) as ‘a vehicle that enables and constrains multidirectional communication flows among the members of a social unit with two or more members’. This interactivity and communication flow means that any social media user “can be a communications source as well as a receiver” (Williams, Phillips & Lum, 1985 p. 247). Subsequently, any user has the opportunity to create content, thereby acting as a communication source should they wish. This focus on user-generated content (Shao, 2009) sharply differentiates social media from other media formats, such as publishing and television in which consumers have a considerably more passive role.

Shao (2009, p. 13) argues that there are three forms of interaction with user-generated media (UGM); consuming, participating and producing. Consuming refers to watching, reading or viewing content created by others. Participating includes user-to-user
interaction as well as user-to-content interaction, for example ranking, sharing, or commenting on content. Lastly, *producing* covers the act of creating and publishing one’s personal content (Shao, 2009, p. 9).

*Fig. 16 - UGM Interdependence model (Shao, 2009, p. 13)*

Though Shao (2009), and our research, support that all three types of interactions are essential for long-term success, we identify the act of *producing* as most important; here, content is created, enabling the two other actions to exist. The user-generated content also plays a critical role to attract the attention of new potential users (Shao, 2009, p. 16). Again, we draw parallels to the service industry, where Norman (2000) discusses how the consumer actively participates in the experience, through co-production. Norman (2000, p. 131) interestingly also points out, that when allowing for the consumer to participate in the production of the experience, one must also consider the various ways different consumer types understand and participate in the process.
Whilst the *Nerds* produce an average amount of content, this is for the most part on sites where they connect with other *Nerds*, however on some platforms they struggle to find value and resultantly produce less. Shao (2009, p. 14) argues that users generating social media content do so, for needs related to self-expression and self-actualisation. This entails ‘working on one’s own identity and reflecting on one’s own personality’ (Trepte, 2005, p. 170). As the *Nerds* are particularly conscientious in how they present themselves to other *Nerds*, they prefer to restrict their behavior to ‘Nerd’ platforms to achieve self-actualisation. PL (2012, app. 1.1.2.2) explains "I rarely really post on Facebook anymore...Maybe because my contact list has been clogged up with people I don’t really want to share with". The *Preps* however, are very active in producing content, like the *Clique* who do so slightly less. Lastly, the *Wallflowers* and the *Outsiders* are passive when it comes to producing and gain far more satisfaction from consuming content created by others.

As with producing, the *Nerds* participate and consume content more readily on networks where they communicate with other *Nerds*, but less so on generic platforms. The *Clique* more actively carry out these, than do the *Preps*, as they thrive off the insights and knowledge of others’ behaviour they may gain when consuming their content. Again, the *Wallflowers* and the *Outsiders* are passive and do not participate with, or consume content often.

Based on our results, we support the argument that the three activities of user generated media “support one another directly or indirectly, by helping people fulfill their respective social and psychological needs” (Shao, 2009, p. 19). Thus we conclude that social media platforms function in a highly organic way. Though the act of producing is the core of social media and essential for the existence of the other two types of activity, we assert all types of activity are necessary. Whilst some groups behavior is predominantly concerned with production, some prefer consuming content, while others favor participating with it. Further, the motivations of the groups differ, and the three forms of interaction enable all groups to act in such a way that they can derive value. Consequently, the diversity of needs can be satisfied, when the 'ecosystem' connects all user groups in the construction and endurance of an interactive medium. If users are to only produce, a medium and its community will not prevail, as the lack of interaction will discourage
the producers. This will also be the case on a platform whereby users only consume, as no content will be generated for them to interact with. Interactivity, and thus the interdependence of the five user groups on social media, enables unification of the community, regardless of different forms of use and individual needs.

**Generalisation 25:**
All users have an impact on one another, regardless of the user group they are categorised within.

**Generalisation 26:**
Producing, participating and consuming behaviours are all integral to a social media platform; however none of these behaviors are of value if expressed in isolation.

Considering that the activity carried out by the various user groups plays an important role in the organic structure of a medium (Shao, 2009), interdependence between the various user groups, regardless of their adeptness or varied levels of participation, exists.

### 5.2.2 Networks

#### 5.2.2.1 Dynamics

The presence of their network is essential for all user groups, however each group receives value from different sources of people within these networks. The *Outsiders’* network is defined by their closest friends and family; while the *Wallflowers* and the *Clique*s have networks that extend beyond these, they only connect with people they know or have encountered offline. The *Preps* and the *Nerds* however, are adventurous when building their network and are comfortable making new friendships online, which they may later solidify offline (ER, 2012, app. 1.2.2.1). This can make the adoption process somewhat easier for these two groups, as there is a much broader range of possible connections, than there are for the groups focused solely on real-world friends. Their willingness to connect with new people online, lends itself to greater motivation to remain active on a platform, than will reconnecting with the same friends, on several platforms.

**Generalisation 27:**
What is constituted as a whole network varies within in each user group.

Based on this finding, it is also apparent that networks are not always composed solely
of an individual’s ‘real life friends’, as networks in social media can also be defined by interest, geographical location or age group (Smith & Kollock, 1999; Wellman & Gulia, 1999; Preece, 2000).

**Generalisation 28:**
Online networks are not restricted solely to real world friendships, but can also be defined by interest or other common denominators.

Just as important is the orientation of the site; so whilst a social network site is fueled by relations between real life friends, a travel site is powered by people’s interest, and a mobile check-in service by geographical location. The less adept social media users (the Outsiders, Wallflowers and Cliques) are likely to connect only with friends and therefore favor network driven platforms, while they are rarely found on alternative mediums. Comparatively, the advanced users (the Preps and Nerds) are likely to favor interest fueled sites. Therefore, for the advanced users in particular, we find that a user’s network does not necessarily consist of the same people on all platforms. A user might connect solely with friends they know in real life on a social network (such as Facebook), while finding greater value in strangers, with whom they share a niche interest, on a content based site.

**Generalisation 29:**
A user’s network does not consist of the same people on all social media platforms.

While social media attempts to replicate offline communication, where friendships and relations are not restricted by differentiating traits such as technological knowledge, social media users are free to communicate across user groups. So, whilst Rogers (2003) views the five user groups as separate entities, who will communicate only with those groups who have previously adopted an innovation, social media differs in that it is built upon networks that are by nature interconnected. For instance, though the Preps find the greatest value in communicating with other Preps, they are also connected with members from the other four groups. These can be a combination of friends, family, colleagues and peers, especially on social networks. Markus (1987) argues that communication is multi-directional when interactive products diffuse. Unlike Rogers
(2003) who claims that user groups only communicate in a sequential manner when adopting, users of interactive products create relationships with and gain value from people from all user groups, despite any barriers the groups may create.

**Generalisation 30:**

Communication on social media is in most cases, not restricted to members of the same user group.

Unlike all the other groups, the *Nerds* share not only in their technological adeptness, but also in their interest in social media and technology itself. Whilst the four other groups are likely to work in a variety of different jobs and have varying and diverse hobbies, the majority of the *Nerds* work in technology related jobs. This strong interest connects them in online communities, in which they can discuss their particular interest. However, the *Nerds* still connect on more generic social networks, on which they will communicate with others regardless of user group.

### 5.2.2.2 Importance

The various user groups use social media to gratify different needs (Charney & Greenberg, 2002, p. 384), but our research also shows that the most dominant reason for joining a medium, second to the users own wish to use a product, is the presence of friends (Table 21, p. 62). Moreover, when comparing the reasons for joining platforms used daily, with the entirety of all responses that indicate the reason for joining, we see that network plays an integral role.

**Table 22 - Comparison of reasons for joining a social medium**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I had read about it in the press</th>
<th>Work purposes</th>
<th>I was invited by a friend</th>
<th>I had a need for the service offered</th>
<th>My friends use it</th>
<th>I was curious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Daily</strong></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When looking at all platforms, regardless of frequency of use, 36%\(^4\) of accounts are created for reasons related to the users’ network. However, for the accounts used daily, thus the platforms the respondents use most frequently, reasons related to friends are of much greater importance; 46%\(^5\). Thus, we find that users are more likely to visit platforms frequently, when friends have played an important role in their decision to join. To further support this argument, we turn to Google, who despite of the company’s status as the world’s leading online company, failed gaining a regular user base for their social network G+, let alone reaching mainstream audiences with the product;

**Case 2 - Google+**

Google+ is a social networking service, owned and operated by internet giant, Google. After having been launched in 2011 as a competitor to Facebook, the site remained invite-only for a mere few weeks, before opening to anyone, due to intense pressure from potential adopters. After a high profile launch, Google+ experienced one of the fastest growth-rates in social media history, and currently has amassed a staggering 400 million registered accounts (Gundotra, 2012).

However, a Google+ profile is automatically assigned to any owner of a Google-account, allowing for the company to advertise a high number of accounts. Whilst this number has helped the company advertise great success, actual use of the platform paints a very different picture. Insights project that 75% of all Google+ accounts are unused, whilst the other 25% is only used on average for 3 minutes per month, compared to 7.5 hours for Facebook (Wasserman, 2012).

Thus, regardless of how technically and functionally superior a social media product is, friends and community are still the strongest attractor. Whilst Google+ managed to

\[\begin{align*}
4 & \quad \text{I was invited by a friend (13%) + My friends use it (23%) = 36%} \\
5 & \quad \text{I was invited by a friend (14%) + My friends use it (32%) = 46%}
\end{align*}\]
create intense hype, on account of their functionally superior product, they missed the true essence of social media: community. Most users who actively attempted adoption of the product and to convince their friends to join, have returned to Facebook; as a social network simply has no value without others present.

Generalisation 31:
The presence of one's network is essential to the continuous use of a platform, for all user groups.

Consequently, individual users depend on both present and potential users, not only when signing up, but also in the value they can gain from them after joining or adopting. Simply put, a user of a social medium can only gain value if others choose to use the same product. So unlike in Rogers (2003) theory, where interaction between users is only important prior to adoption, communication between users on social media after the point of joining, and even post-adoption, is just as important, if not more so. Consequently, social media networks become much more complex and multilayered than those relationships portrayed in Rogers (2003) theory. Each user group can therefore not be seen as an isolated entity, but rather is an active fragment in a web of intertwined networks; all influencing one another during all stages of the product life cycle.

Markus (1987, p. 492) argues that someone considering use of an interactive product are very unlikely to do so, unless a sizable number of their connections are already existing users. Our results also puts forth, that while some users are willing to sign up for a platform where none of their friends are present, all users are likely to discontinue use, if none of their friends join the platform.

Generalisation 32:
Rejection by an individual may happen if user comes to acknowledge that their networks or communities of interest are not active, fail to join, or reject a medium.

5.2.2.3 Effect
On account of the above discoveries, we find that any adopter, regardless of their time of joining or technical ability, have the possibility to affect any number of potential or current users of a social medium, through their use and behaviour. This does not
necessarily happen in a direct or conscious way, but can occur as a result of consumption or participation with others’ content. The user can thereby contribute to the organic structure of a successful social medium and influence users within their close or distant communities to continue use.

We thus deduce that the acknowledgement of interdependence between adopter groups, as well as individual adopters, is vital to the launch, marketing and sustainability of a social media product.

Generalisation 33:
Creators of social media must acknowledge its interdependent structure to achieve commercial success.

5.2.3 Content
Content is essential both for the creation of identity of a medium, as well as for the people who adopt it (Shao, 2006); be it updates on users’ personal life, content imported from other sites or productions made by the users themselves. The commonality of this content is that it is always chosen or created by the users. Therefore, for a social media to appeal to any number of users, care must be taken to prevent some user groups from hijacking the site and overcrowding it with specific content. This can make it a homogenous environment, and act as a deterrent for other users. The most successful social platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, manage to provide an environment, where various interest groups can subsist alongside one another. Such platforms also entertain an environment, where users can communicate outside segregated communities and interact with other users, who they differ from significantly.

Content therefore plays an essential role in the success of social media, and benefits it when of superior quality. Agichtein et al. (2008) argues that quality content on social media is determined on the basis of three factors;

- **Intrinsic content quality**
  Characterised by for example strong spelling and grammar in any formulated text, and high-quality recordings of sound and movie clips.
User relationships
Characterised by the most appropriate people having produced the content, and the best fit recipients having received it. A mutual exchange in value between the various participants denotes this factor contributes to high quality content.

Usage statistics
Characterised by the extent to which content is interacted with through comments, likes and/or shares, and thus the degree to which it is consumed by others.

On the basis of this and our findings, we suggest that content, when of high quality, has the ability to travel across group barriers, and is not only relative or of interest to users from their own group. Our study shows that the Nerds, traditionally targeted by new technology products (such as social media), are likely to generate content that is heavily associated with their primary interest: technology. As this content does not necessarily appeal to a wide variety of users or encourage interaction (important characteristics of high quality content (Agichtein et al., 2008)), the Nerds do not appear to be attractive early users of a product. Whilst these technology savvy users are easy to win over in the early stages of the product lifecycle, an overabundance of them can disservice a product gravely. They are likely to create content that can be deemed unattractive by other user groups, if they are left unrestrained.

Case 3 – Kinetik
Created through the collaborative innovation camp ‘Startup-weekend’, Kinetik provides a mobile (and tablet accessible) platform for users to recommend and reviews apps. Through the close and tech-savvy network in attendance at Startup-weekend, Kinetik gained a following overnight. Now a full-time project for the four-man team, a large part of their success can be attributed to the well-connected advisors, who helped drive further interest and attention towards the product.

However, despite its initial success the team has for some time plateaued in user growth, and are struggling to gain access to a mainstream following. As the platform has built an image based on advanced users,
the content within it has now created an identity, with which the average user struggles to identify. Instead of providing a service on which the average mobile user can search for recommendations and ideas for applications to download, the platform has evolved into a forum solely for Nerds to promote and share apps they have created themselves, or which are highly specific to their own personal demographics. When released to the mass market, curious and less advanced users have therefore found recommendations for apps that they are unable to identify with, thus limiting the potential audience to other Nerds; a group not likely to recommend products and very likely to discontinue use (RM, 2012, app. 1.1.1.1).

Therefore, as the Nerds are so engulfed in their interest for media and technology, and often use social media to discuss and share their passion with other Nerds, they can quickly overpopulate a medium and create an identity for the product, different than that which was originally intended by its creators.

**Generalisation 34:**
An over-abundance of advanced users in the early stages of a product's life-cycle, can weaken its likelihood of spreading to a mainstream audience.

Conclusively, diverse content plays a critical role in the evolution and success of a social medium and platforms should thus provide a fertile environment for various communities to subsist. Pinterest, where users can bookmark pages and share the content they find interesting, took on a surprising identity, by targeting users outside the traditional tech-savvy type.

**Case 4 – Pinterest**
Pinterest, the social-visual bookmarking platform, is a strong example of a generic platform that can be used by virtually any user with any number of interests. Their mission statement explicitly states that the site can be used to browse content created by other users, and 'to discover new things and get inspiration from people who share your interests,' (Pinterest, 2012). This depicts the company’s mission to provide a service
that is customisable and useful to any user - regardless of their interests.

However, the platform began its course towards attracting a wide user-set, based on a strategy that sought out a narrow user base in its early stages. After the site launched, users were required to submit a request to join, which allowed the company to screen applicants and award accounts to the highly specific user type, they had determined as a target (McNair, 2012). The majority of accounts were awarded to females within a general age range, and with an appreciation for design and aesthetics; early on in the platform's life-cycle, their content branded the site. However, this content was also highly ambiguous and heterogeneous in its appeal, to a very broad range of demographics beyond those initial users. Their propensity to share their experiences on social media and offline through word-of-mouth, activated interest from a vast number of new user groups (Buck, 2012). As the fastest growing site to date (McNair, 2012), the platform now continues to attract users, who are far different than the ones targeted in the platform's early stages.

Subsequently, users' content assigns meaning and collectively creates an image that assigns an either relatable or unrelatable brand to the social medium. Too narrow an image can prevent new users from joining the platform, while a broad image can help build a following if successful. However, while certain groups may be attracted to or deterred by existent content, the versatility of social media allow users to control the service to best suit their needs and filter to exclude undesirable content. This makes it possible for different communities to coexist, and feel equally welcome on the same platform (Shao, 2009, p. 19).
5.3 LEAD USERS AND THE BELL CURVE

5.3.1 The Bell Curve

The curve created by Rogers (2003, p. 272), that plots users onto a graph depicting adoption of an innovation, follows a “normal bell-shaped curve when plotted over time on a frequency basis”. Moore (2000) refers to the adoption curve as the ‘technology adoption life cycle’, and proposes that a company should approach it from left to right; conquering one user group after the next (Moore, 2000, p. 13). He also posits that “it is important to gain momentum and thereby create a bandwagon effect that makes the next group buy in,” as there is a ‘small window of opportunity’ which if lost, can result in the position in the market being overtaken by a competitor (Moore, 2000, p. 13).

Consequently, both theorists argue that dependence between user groups follow a sequential pattern. Thus, a laggard (the last group to join, and in our case referred to as the Outsiders) is highly influenced by earlier groups, as these play a significant role in the laggards decision process. In contrast, an innovator (the first group to join, and in our case referred to as the Nerds) cannot be influenced by a laggard, as the laggard simply does not know about the product, at the time of the innovator’s adoption. Both Moore (2000) and Rogers (2003) consequently argue, that in order to promote adoption, user groups should be approached based on their level of innovativeness, starting with the most innovative user group. Existing diffusion theory therefore asserts, that the strategy to attract users should be tailored individually to each group. This is based on the assumption that groups will fall into a coherent pattern, and that a company must refocus marketing efforts, as the curve progresses sequentially. If applying this to social media, marketers will be required to convince the Nerds to join a product first, and once successful, continue to the Preps, the Cliques, the Wallflowers and finally the Outsiders;
However, we assert that this is an entirely invalid approach, in the context of social media. Because social media users are highly diverse, it is unfitting to approach users in sequence, and arguably impossible, as users from each of the groups are likely to join sporadically and inconsistently compared to adopters of non-social, offline products.

Thus, based upon the findings within the three pillars of social media; activity, network and content, as well as the characteristics assigned to our various social media user groups, users should not be approached in the same sequential manner as posited by Rogers (2003) and Moore (2000), because:

**Generalisation 35:**

The five social media user groups do not adopt in a sequential pattern

**Generalisation 36:**

The five social media user groups do not lead in a sequential pattern.

5.3.1.1 Adoption patterns

Our data uncovered an inability to fit social media user groups into a pattern, solely on the basis of time at which they adopted, due to the fluid process that is character of social media adoption. As it is possible for the earliest joining account-holders to fail to use a service, late-joining users may use it in a very dedicated and continuous manner; thus, it is inappropriate to categorise social media users as either ‘early’ or ‘late’.

**Generalisation 37:**

The bell curve, as proposed by Rogers (2003), is not an accurate depiction of how social media users join or adopt a new medium.
Though the concept of time is not entirely arbitrary, when categorising users within the five user groups, it is not the utmost dominant factor. We acknowledge that the more advanced users are likely to learn about, and try out, a new medium earlier than will less advanced users, due to their curious nature and technological knowledge. However, we also find that more advanced users will not adopt, until their community is present; thus we cannot assume that the advanced groups are first to adopt.

Due to the ability to intermittently trial a social media product, time of sign up, or the act of signing up itself, can not be used as a measurement tool, as this does not necessitate that the site will be continually used. Rather, a user’s activity, understanding of, and relationship to a service must be analysed in the context of their community. As we define community as ‘a group of any size, consisting of persons already united or with the possibility of connecting through communication, on the basis of a commonality’ (app. 4.2), we put forth that adoption has the potential to occur simultaneously in various communities at different rates. So, whilst one community may only have attracted a small group of users, another can be much further in the adoption process. Thus, we argue that the adoption process can occur in staggered patterns, where one community might be farther in the process, whilst others are premature in comparison.

**Generalisation 38:**

Innumeros staggered adoption processes can occur simultaneously on a social medium.

### 5.3.1.2 Leading patterns

As all social media users are in some regard interconnected, they have the opportunity to interact with others. However, this does not mean that they are capable of leading them.

Whilst the *Nerds* are not natural-born leaders and are unlikely to make any efforts to convince their peers to join a medium, they are often revered by others. The *Nerds* are capable of leading other *Nerds*, as they are likely to join mediums they can see others are using. As the *Preps* often look up to the *Nerds*, they are indirectly affected by these and thus likely to join mediums used by them. However, as the *Preps* rarely recommend media to others or try to convince their friends to join, they resultanty are not thought-
leaders to any other group. The *Wallflowers* and *Outsiders* are naturally lead by the *Cliques*, but the *Cliques* only feel comfortable joining new media after members of their own group have joined. Thus, the *Cliques* are active leaders of the less advanced groups, but have no one to lead them.

**Generalisation 39:**

Though social media user groups are able to interact with one another, they are not all capable of leading each other.

So, if one was to attempt converting one group at a time as suggested by Rogers (2003) and Moore (2000), a chasm would present itself as no group bridges the *Preps* and the *Cliques*.

### 5.3.2 The Chasm

*Fig. 18 - The Social Media Chasm*

Moore (2000, pp. 16-19) argues that the *adoption life-cycle*, and the user groups that are used in its assembly, are separated by cracks and chasms, that creates a diverse set of challenges, which must be overcome to achieve critical mass. Though Moore’s (2000) model is mirrored on Rogers’ bell-curve, which portrays the adoption life-cycle on the basis of time, it is still to some extent applicable to our findings. However, rather than sorting the various user groups by their innovativeness, and thus their time of adoption, we categorise them based on their level of technological adeptness and acknowledge
that adoption does not necessarily happen in the order in which they are presented. When portraying how the various users can act as thought-leaders, and affect each other’s likelihood of adoption, we still find that a type of ‘chasm’ hinders further adoption of social media. Whilst Moore (2000) believes that there are smaller ‘cracks’ to overcome between ‘innovators’ (in our study referred to as the Nerds) and ‘early adopters’ (in our study referred to as the Preps) as well as between the early and late majority (the Cliques and the Wallflowers, in our study), the real challenge lies between the early adopters (the Preps) and the early majority (the Cliques).

According to Moore (2000), this chasm exists as a result of the differing motivations of the two groups. Early adopters demand revolution and extreme novelty, whilst the early majority insist on gradual evolution and relativity as an integral quality of the innovation. Secondly, early adopters are comfortable dealing with software-related bugs and risks, while the early majority is heavily averse to both these aspects of the early stages of a product. Moore (2000) thereby presents a paradoxical situation that was left unaccounted for by Rogers (2003); a member of the early majority will not listen to recommendations from an early adopter, as their motivations are simply too foreign. For a member of the early majority to commence use of a new innovation, another member of the early majority must already have done so. This same issue becomes apparent in our study, as the Preps can not lead the Cliques, as they simply will not listen to them.

Generalisation 40:
The Preps are unable to lead any of the other user groups onto a new social medium.

If the Clique will only trust other users in their group, who will be the first to bring a new product into their closed circle? Moore (2000, p. 64) argues that the way to do this, is by ‘focusing an overabundance of support into a confined market niche’. By centering efforts on a smaller segment of the early majority, creators of social media can effectively build up trust and collateral, that can later be used to entice the rest of the group to join. As Moore furthers Rogers’ (2003) theory, by identifying the existence of a chasm, he also argues that users should be addressed in a sequential manner. However, he also introduces the idea of overcoming the chasm, by focusing on winning over smaller segments within the groups.
5.3.3 The Community Layering Approach

The products used to create the theories of Rogers (2003) and Moore (2000), are evaluated according to their technical ability, the practical problem(s) they are suited to address and their ability to be employed in a professional setting. Social media is not evaluated by adopters according to any of these facets; as users do not consider, nor do they choose products, based on how technically advanced other users on the platform are. These products function as platforms for communication, and their perceived value depends on successful communication with others; thus evaluation of social media is subjective. Further, as argued by our interviewees, the presence of friends is of considerably greater importance, than is functionality. So we posit, that the primary reason for any user group to consider putting a social media product into use, is the presence of their connections. With that in mind, we then postulate why these relationships exist? The people forming them, simply share in a common attribute, be it interest, age, location or relation; just as in traditional, offline relationships.

Generalisation 41:
Relationships based on common attributes are the key drivers of social media adoption.

As community and communication span across user groups, so must the strategy of social media creators. It cannot focus solely on attracting users who possess the same technical ability as each other, but should rather focus on the users’ primary motivation for use: having access to a community united by commonality, similarity, and familiarity. Companies must appreciate the interconnected dynamics of the offline, social environments that mimic themselves on social media, and thus should not approach users in a sequential pattern. Rather, a social media company should approach all user groups simultaneously.
So, instead of trying to reach an entire user group such as the *Nerds*, based on the presumption that the *Preps* will then follow, we suggest an alternative to target potential adopters of social media platforms; by attracting communities of commonality. These smaller communities possess users from each social media user group, and have a distinct common denominator that defines them, aside from their technical ability; such as age, location or interest. Thus, to diffuse a social media innovation, so that all user groups can coexist, we present the ‘Community Layering Approach’. When the first community layer has been built, through a community of commonality, and adoption has occurred for those users within it, marketing efforts can be focused on the next layer of users.
This new layer consists of another community of commonality, that can bring additional value to the platform and increase the user base.

**Generalisation 42:**

All user groups should be simultaneously recruited based on a common denominator, rather than their technical ability.

This approach resembles that of Anderson's (2006) ‘long tail’, in which it is suggested that marketing efforts should focus on targeting smaller, less established consumer groups, who together can accumulate to a large and profitable group.

*Fig. 20 - The Long Tail (Anderson, 2006)*

In his theory, Anderson (2006) acknowledges that while the mass market might appear profitable, it is also the market with the greatest competition and thus the highest barriers for entry. Anderson recognises that smaller markets are easier to tap into, and more cost efficient, than is competing for the mass market. However, by focusing on small, overlooked groups, whose needs are not satisfied by other products, it is likely a customer base, equivalent to that of the mainstream market, can be created over time (Anderson, 2006). Furthermore, these customers can influence the mainstream market. This focus on smaller, quality groups is exactly what we suggest in the ‘Community Layered Approach’, as social media marketers can create a strong foundation for future growth by using
smaller groups, to slowly create value for the larger market.

**Generalisation 43:**
Smaller communities should be approached, to gradually create quality content that has the potential to travel across user groups and encourage diffusion.

This approach was successfully implemented by the largest and most well-known social network to date, Facebook;

**Case 5 – Facebook**

Facebook, the world’s leading social media platform, launched in 2004 when it was founded by three Harvard students. Initially, membership was limited to other Harvard students, controlled by allowing only those with Harvard student email addresses to create an account. Quickly the tool expanded to include colleges in the Boston area, Ivy League universities and Stanford University. As the site gained popularity and positive word-of-mouth, it was gradually further opened to integrate international university students, and later high school students, onto the platform. In 2008, when demand was significant, the company invited anyone from the age 13 and over, to join (Carlson, 2012). A short four years, characterised by excessive user growth, lead to the celebration of the site having reached a record high of 1 billion monthly active users worldwide, in 2012 (Facebook, 2012).

Developing an elite community for those within a highly localised demographic, by only permitting sign-ups from users with a specific email domain, Facebook managed to create an attractive medium for advanced users. However, simultaneously they provided a localised and ‘safe’ environment for the less advanced users to explore and connect. Users automatically possessed a clear connection to each other, and thus were able to identify both with people and conversation, despite their lack of technical knowledge. Members of the Cliques, as well as the even less advanced users, were thereby made comfortable in their embarking into new terrain.

The inclusion of users from all user groups, improves the likelihood of content being
created, that will appeal to a broad range of users. A broad user base also affects the overall quality of the content, as defined by Agichtein et al. (2008). By having all user groups involved, online platforms can mimic the organic structure of an offline social network. When all five groups are present on a social platform, the activities carried out by the various users, support one another and create a content-enhancing synergy. Whilst the *Nerds*’ desire to participate in critical discussions can be met, the *Preps* are satisfied in their freedom to produce various content. The *Clique*, can interact with content and also discuss it with their friends, whilst the *Wallflowers* and *Outsiders* may consume or carry out a variety of responses to the content. This assures the quality evaluation criteria, as identified by Agichtein et al (2008), is satisfied.

Furthermore, the synergy created by the presence of all groups, prevents a single user group from hijacking the site and create content, that will only encourage like users to join. Instead it ensures cross-group communication, that is necessary to encourage further growth and enhance the prospects of reaching critical mass. Thus, with the goal of converting small communities that contain users from all groups simultaneously, it is possible to fulfill and meet the varying values and needs of all the groups. Furthermore, quality content creation, hype and virality, created by the already active users, invoke a desire for non-users to join.

5.3.3.1 Exclusivity and the bandwagon effect

The ‘fad bandwagon effect’, by Meyer & Rowan (1977), explains how information about who has adopted an innovation, rather than the functionality of the innovation itself, can have an influence on potential adopters. As users adopt an innovation, the more likely it is that others become aware, that they too should adopt. Further, a potential adopter’s perceived risk reduces as the number of adopters increases; this is likely to provoke skeptical or potential adopters, to finally take the ‘leap of faith’ to adopt an innovation.

As users adopt, a social pressure to conform ensues, encouraging people to commence use of a product, thereby reinforcing the bandwagon effect (Abrahamson & Rosenkopf, 1997, p. 292). This effect is particularly apparent in the inherent ‘fear of missing out’, expressed by the majority of the social media users in this study. By convincing a large enough proportion of a community to join a medium, a company can encourage others
to do so as well, as the fear of losing legitimacy or being left behind by the majority, can work as an effective motivation (Pennings & Harianto, 1992). Thus the bandwagon effect is extremely powerful in encouraging adoption of a social medium, as user growth reduces insecurities of hesitant persons; leaving few other significant barriers for further adoption.

Generalisation 44:
Exclusive, strong communities can have a bandwagon effect of attracting non-adopters.

Pinterest (case 4, p. 112) successfully undertook this method, by launching their platform on an invite-only basis. Current users were rewarded a quota of invites to share with friends, who could alternatively request an invite through the platform, in hopes of becoming selected as a privileged early user. This approach had a series of effects on the platform, that depicts the various positive outcomes that a company can derive from an interest-focussed, exclusivity model, rather than one based on technical ability. In no particular order, these four elements can be obtained, when building a platform using the ‘Community Layering Approach’;

- **High Quality Content**
  As users are specifically selected, either by the social media company or by existing users, new users are more likely to have a close relation or need for the specific offering of the platform. Users will therefore be likely to create content, or engage with existing content, in a way that provides quality to the platform and thus helps it diffuse across user groups;

- **Appeal Across User Groups**
  As the community in which the users interact is both focussed and intimate, it is not solely the technologically advanced users, who are made to feel comfortable in trialing a new product. In such an inclusive environment, users are likely to become more active and loyal, than they would on a platform, where both content and community can overwhelm, intimidate and thus deter a new user;
Active New Users
As new users are invited by trusted connections, they are likely to feel a degree of responsibility towards these connections, to prove their worth and appreciation. As a result, they are also much more motivated and likely to create content and regularly visit the platform, than had they joined the platform on their own accord;

Sub-communities
As users join and gain value from the platform, they will become more motivated to encourage others to join too. As such, a web of interconnected users, who have the potential to derive value from one another can flourish; thus bringing all members closer to the previously identified concept of communal adoption.

To summarise; instead of approaching users on the basis of their technical ability, they should be approached based on a common denominator, on one or more of the following: 1) interest; 2) location or 3) demographic. By focussing efforts on gaining the interests of one community, to create an initial loyal base of users, these users will gain a sense of attachment, that is pertinent in enlightening them to demand the presence of others, thereby enticing them to promote or create new communities. These communities become the foundation of the layers, that develop and compound a platform's users base in the 'Community Layering Approach'.

5.3.3.2 Building the layers
Building the layers of a social medium is a delicate balancing act, but one that closely resembles offline relationships and interactions. Take a real life example; if a hundred strangers are to congregate in an enclosed space, and asked to network with one another, numerous small groups will likely form. It is likely that these groups will be arbitrary, and based on proximity in the room. Some may not even find a group, thus leaving them isolated and unable to gain value from the crowd. Such a situation will overwhelm most individuals; making it likely for only a few and strong characters to succeed in connecting with others. Weaker and passive people, will probably resign and give up, resorting to the periphery of the space. A similar circumstance is likely to be the result of a social media platform, whose strategy in the onset of a product's life-cycle, is
focussed on attracting a too large group, that has too broad a range of interests.

**Generalisation 45:**
Social media platforms that are too broad at the onset, will be unable to connect people and create social bonds.

However, using the same analogy, but with a smaller group of users bearing a recognised common denominator, the result is likely to be more positive. Insecure people will deem it less intimidating, if they can directly relate with a smaller selection of people. This encourages relationships to form. Furthermore, as people create bonds, they are able to create synergies larger than themselves as individuals, and thus gain confidence in connecting with others. This same situation can occur on a social medium, when the ‘Community Layering Approach’ is integrated.

**Generalisation 46:**
Small communities of commonality can create safety, quality and synergy.

If successful, social media platforms can become viral. This can also generate great value for existing users, as the community might otherwise become saturated with users, who no longer deliver novelty. Burt (1992, p. 49) argues that "contacts are redundant to the extent that they lead to the same people, and so provide the same information benefits". If the focus remain too narrow and new communities are not incorporated, a social medium is in danger of becoming flooded with users, who connect solely with people, they are already somehow related to. The introduction of the next layer, should thus be done in such a manner, so to ensure gradual growth. When opening up the platform to new communities, the strong foundation of content and relationships built by the initial community, acts as a catalyst for growth of the new layer. The existing users will welcome the fresh ideas and content, while the new users will encounter novelty in pre-existing content and a sense of collective. Thus, there is an ultimate need for several communities to co-exist, so users can transfer knowledge and content between these; creating a web of value exchange and non-redundant relationships (Burt, 1992, p. 47). It is the responsibility of the social media company, to evaluate when the existing community is becoming saturated and thus open it up to the next layer. We foresee that adoption by the initial
layers and their subsequent communities, can further organic and natural growth without interference or efforts by the company.

**Generalisation 47:**
By gradually layering smaller communities onto a platform, organic growth can eventually occur.

### 5.3.4 The New Lead User

With the ‘Community Layering Approach’, the ‘lead user’ can no longer be defined as the most technologically advanced; the *innovators*, reminiscent of our social media group the *Nerds*. Rather, it is the individuals users comprising the communities of commonality, that span all of five user groups. It will be particularly difficult to find these users within the more reluctant user groups, making this approach by no means an easy method, but one that can serve as a sustainable solution, to encourage long-term success.

While Rogers (2003) suggests that the most advanced and knowledgeable first-movers, the *Nerds*, must be targeted by marketers, we have proven this strategy as unsuitable for social media. Rogers (2003) also argues that these users can both afford and are willing to spend money on an innovation, that may demand absorption of high levels of risk. As social media products incur no monetary cost, we have also concluded that companies are not restricted in targeting people from any demographic or group, on the basis of affluence or personal finance.

Rather, what users to target should be determined on the basis of who will create the most widely appreciated content, and who will advocate for other users to join them on the platform. Thus, creators of social media must identify a community, whose individual users can later promote the product to *new* communities. With that said, we assert that the concept of ‘the new lead user” for social media, demands recognition as a collection of users, who include members of all five groups, and are not delimited by technical ability. We therefore identify the new lead user not as an individual, but as a community.

**Generalisation 48:**
The lead users of social media are not individuals, but are rather communities.
A company that has managed to successfully identify their lead user community, and thus build a sustainable user base, is Everplaces;

**Case 6 - Everplaces**

Everplaces is accessible as a mobile application, and online platform, and encourages the search and documentation of physical places around the world, that one has visited or is interested in. Since the launch of its beta in 2011, the company has made conscious efforts to understand their users, and encourage the ‘right’ users to get involved. While the idea of the product was fostered at ‘Startup Weekend’, which initially lent access to a technologically advanced community in Copenhagen, the team took a series of steps to exclude these *Nerds* from the product in the early stages of its life-cycle. By targeting the product towards an international selection of younger females, with a propensity for travel, food and culture, they managed to encourage the development of a community of commonality. Efforts including the removal of the option to mark a location with the tag ‘sport’, Everplaces was successful in subtly excluding the demographics, that would encourage the *Nerds* to join; namely younger men. They further stimulated the interest of the lesser-able user groups, through restriction of product features in its early stages, while gradually introducing complexity at intervals.

Having recently launched a new version of the platform, Everplaces is gaining international recognition, and due to its efforts to cautiously and systematically introduce new features, the platform has succeeded in fostering a network, that creates quality content, contains passionate users and has fostered strong relationships through sharing. Such a strategy has enabled Everplaces to continue to succeed in attracting passionate users, whose content denotes the product a competitive edge, in the cluttered marketplace of travel and geolocation, bookmarking services (TT, 2012, app. 1.1.1.2).

The above case illustrates the valuable learning, that rapid growth on a social medium often triggers rapid failure. Though the bypassing of the *Nerds* admittedly demands a
lengthier process, such a strategy can build a stronger community, on the basis of quality rather than quantity. By understanding that content and quality can drive user sign-ups while enhancing the product, Everplaces successfully identified a community, that possessed a specific need for such a product. Once identified, Everplaces customised and communicated their product to target precisely the people they wanted, and not those who would be the easiest to reach. To accommodate the various levels of adeptness in this community, they took great care to avoid overwhelming the users with functions, and provided the ability to streamline the depth of the product’s features, as per the individuals’ needs.

To better understand who the new ‘lead-users’ are, the following recurring factors continue to show prominence as being key qualities, that can help ascertain users fit to further a platform’s growth. These characteristics can be used to identify an ideal community, rather than a selection of individuals, to initially target.

- **Loyalty**
  The users must dedicate themselves to the site in question, in that they will both continue use post sign-up and avoid seeking an alternative. This quality can be found in a community that identifies with an unmet need, where no market leader, nor array of alternative solutions, has succeeded in providing an environment for such.

- **Connectivity**
  The users must be moderately connected, either on- or offline, with members of the target community or with other potential communities, that can later be encouraged to join. This quality can be found in offline communities, where people actively share in a specific subject of interest, or online on non-social sites, where thought-leaders on the subject are to some degree related to other persons, with whom they share a commonality.

- **Interest**
  The users must have an interest in communicating about the identified commonality, that can motivate production, interaction or consumption of related content. This quality can be identified in potential users with
professions related to the subject, or in people who may already participate in related online activities, that depicts an interest in a commonality.

Together, these three factors can aid in seeking out a community of users, made up of members of the five user groups, who when unified by a commonality, can be used as a driver to build the first layer of a social medium’s user base. Such a community, if adequately nurtured, can allow for a company to triumph in broadening the user base, thus successfully incorporating diversity. Such a community, as well as the process of its identification, is highly subjective. A series of individuals cannot be arbitrarily selected to compose an initial community; rather a company must identify a market, in which they can provide value for an existing community of commonality, that has a need for the product in question. Such a community, containing members of all five user groups, will inaugurate the nucleus of a social network, so that it can continue to grow with committed and loyal adopters.
6.0 CONCLUSION
6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 RESEARCH SUMMARY

Like Rogers (2003), we categorise social media users into five adopter groups, or as referred to in our study, user groups. Due to the community aspect of social media, we find inspiration for the naming of our groups in a prominent offline community; the high school. This permits the categorisation of the user types, and allows us to reflect their characteristics and results in the following titles; the Outsiders, the Wallflowers, the Cliques, the Preps and the Nerds.

These five groups share several common features with those of Rogers (2003). However, whilst innovativeness, and thereby time of adoption, plays an important role in the categorisation by Rogers (2003), point of adoption is almost undefinable in social media, due to the inconsistent behaviour and joining patterns of the various groups. Time is therefore not of utmost importance, when categorising a social media user. Instead we turn to qualitative features, such as behaviour, emotions and technological adeptness, as key factors that assist in determining the appropriate group in which a user is member.

In the analysis of the social media decision process, we identify a new stage, the trial, which we incorporate. This stage occurs post sign-up, and is the most integral stage in the social media decision process; users often remain affixed in the trial, given a tendency to return to a platform intermittently. Friends are an essential element, that have a significant impact on a user’s decision process, in that their presence can solidify a user’s allegiance to a product. Regardless of how a product’s features compare to those of an alternative platform, friends still take precedence. Thus, the successful completion of the trial stage, whereby a user adopts, is dependent on a their friends and online connections having a presence and being active on a medium. On the basis of this
finding we conclude that adoption is not an individual decision in social media, but is rather a stage, dependent on the presence of friends, and thereby occurring within a community.

Due to a lack of adoption barriers, such as monetary cost, and with the incorporation of the trial stage, users are highly likely to reject a social medium, either before or after adoption. We therefore introduce four types of rejection; these are likely to transpire if network, activity or content is lacking. We identify the presence of these three elements, as essential for the success of a social medium.

On account of our discoveries, including the fact that time cannot be a determinant for user categorisation, joining patterns are not sequential on social media, and adoption is communal, we also re-evaluate the concept of the traditional lead user, and assess its validity in relation to social media. Rogers (2003) and many theorists, who have studied how innovations diffuse through networks, argue that the most innovative users must first be converted, to successfully diffuse an innovation, whereby all user groups subsequently adopt. However, this is not relative for social media. Our results prove that all users are interconnected and interdependent across user groups, both before and after creating an account on a medium. We therefore conclude that all social media user groups play an essential role in the diffusion of a platform. This is supported by the fact that the various groups have a propensity to produce, interact and consume content differently.

While we identify a chasm between the Preps and the Cliques, where there is no identifiable user to further diffusion by leading others to join; we go on to suggest an alternative approach for creators of social media, to diffuse a product. We present the 'Community Layering Approach', whereby all user groups are approached simultaneously, by attracting smaller communities of commonality, that include members of all the social media user groups. Identifying users on the basis of a commonality, rather than on their technical adeptness, is vital when determining the initial users to approach. We thus conclude that there is a need for social media companies to undertake this long-term strategy, based on communities rather than user/adopter groups, to ensure that the needs of the various users are satisfied and to encourage sustainable growth.
6.2 UNPREDICTED FINDINGS

6.2.1 Lack of commitment
Given its widespread popularity, it came as a surprise to learn that users’ attachment to social media is typically insubstantial. Many of the user groups expressed they would be rather unphased, if unable to access social media. Furthermore we found that after signing up for, and even adopting a medium, users are likely to discontinue use. On the basis of these two findings, we determined that ‘amount of accounts’ its not an accurate measurement for determining how advanced a user of social media is, nor can the total number of accounts on a platform depict its success or likelihood of attracting future signups. Lastly, this also requires that creators of social media must assign significant resources to retain current users, whilst implementing strategies that serve to attract further users to join.

6.2.2 Time as an arbitrary factor
Already during the process of coding our data, the concept of time began to surface as an arbitrary factor, when attempting to categorise social media users. However, even after defining our user groups on the basis of their behavior, we were still unable to identify patterns related to time that differentiated the groups; such as time of joining, time of adoption, and time spent on a platform. This is a particularly prominent finding, as creators of social media continue to refer to users, and categorise them, on the basis of being ‘early’ or ‘late’. Further, it was unexpected that adoption could not be determined as occurring at a definitive point.

6.2.3 Differentiating adoption processes
One of the key factors differentiating the five user groups in our study, are their varying processes of adoption. Though the groups were created on the basis of other findings, clear patterns emerged in regards to how the individuals within them adopt. The speed at which these users adopt is distinctively different, and some stages are completely bypassed by some user groups. This is a factor that is non-existent in the original diffusion theory by Rogers (2003).

6.2.4 Lack of a lead group
When using Rogers’ (2003) theory of diffusion as a foundation for our study, we assumed
we would succeed in suggesting an alternative group of lead users. However, after uncovering the complexities that are inherent in interconnectedness, we learned this is not possible in social media. Instead, the group classification serves in helping to better understand how the various users behave, so to effectively reach members of each simultaneously. Approaching communities, rather than users on the basis of their group classification, should thus be the focus. This came as a novel finding from our research, that could also serve to guide the creators of social media, so to prevent the saturation of new products with technology-focused content, that can occur when applying Rogers’ (2003) theory.

6.2.5 Importance of communities
In identifying the importance of communities of commonality, we unearthed a series of surprising findings. Whilst social media naturally lends itself to the coexistence of communities, it was unexpected to find they are the most reliable source to promote long-term success of a platform. We found that an understanding of how to best approach and accommodate these communities, is key in unlocking the complex web of users on social media. While less advanced users, both in past and at present, are continually overlooked, we have proven that this predisposition is both damaging and unfit in its application to social media.

6.2.6 Challenges in the market
As social media has gradually become mainstream, many have attempted to create a product in hope of achieving prosperity in the likes of Facebook. Due to the low production costs, programmers and designers can easily create novel and functional social media products. Yet, we have found that the attraction is not dependent on a superior product, but rather on the people using it and dynamics between them. We therefore suggest that creators of social media, avert their primary focus from a product’s features, to understanding users and accommodating communities of commonality.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

6.3.1 Social media platform categorisation
We categorise the 31 platforms posited in our study, on the basis of the platform’s purpose.
These fall within four categories; mobile-, network-, content-, and service-driven platforms. However, as social media becomes increasingly mainstream, its span also widens. Where early platforms were focused on network, consumers today rely on social media as a means for both entertainment, organisation, communication and even as a human-centric replacement for search engines. Defining the various types of social media would therefore bring considerable value, and serve to further expand our research, by providing a more advanced comprehension of the nuances of behaviour. We thus put forth a need for further research into the categorisation of social media platforms; to understand the differences of both the platforms themselves, and how users’ behaviours and motivations vary on each type.

6.3.2 Varied value of behaviour and connections
While social media naturally lends itself to the ability to communicate with others, the social nature of a product can be very subtle and unobtrusive. As such, we assert that the ability to make, or communicate with, connections on social media is what sets it apart from other technology. However, it is the action of communicating with a connection that deems a medium social, and thus creates value for the user. That said, each individual connection has a different impact on a user. A richer knowledge of how the different types of interaction impact both a medium and each individual user, can further the understanding of what behaviours should be particularly encouraged, to gain and sustain users.

6.3.3 Varied types of connection
Social media platforms often refer to connections between people as “friendships”. One could argue that most individuals constitute a friend as someone they know on a intimate and personal level. However, social media allows users to form relationships with people they might know, but would not communicate with, on a regular basis, if at all; such as old school friends, neighbours or friends of friends. Social media platforms even facilitate relationships between strangers. On these grounds, we anticipate that all connections do not hold the same value for a user, and put forth that further research into the definition of relationships on social media is necessary. This can assist creators of social media in determining the value of connections made on a platform, and if applied, could strengthen the typology put forth in this thesis.
6.3.4 Communities of commonalities

Users may participate in any number of communities on social media; these communities of commonality are highly complex in the various forms they may take. Further study on the types of communities can advance the understanding of the impact these have on users, and serve to help companies better understand how to create an environment fertile for them to flourish.
7.0 LITERATURE
7.0 LITERATURE

7.1 REFERENCE LIST


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