Master’s Thesis
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Entering the real-time web
Understanding how companies engage their brands on the real-time web

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Preface
This thesis is written as the final dissertation on the Master’s Programme in Media Studies at the University of Copenhagen. According to the curriculum, part of the overall aim of the master’s thesis is to:

“Identify a delineated issue within media studies and make it the object of an independent and in-dept academic analysis [...] reflect critically on theoretical and methodical choices in relation to an academic issue”

The primary emphasis is to examine the opportunities and challenges that companies face when engaging their brands on the real-time web. The theoretical foundation is based on an interdisciplinary framework that draws on the academic traditions of medium theory, branding theory and sociological theory. The empirical part of the thesis is based on three case studies: SAS, Berlingske and Normann Copenhagen. The thesis is 80 standard pages of 2,400 characters including spaces in length.

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**Resumé**

*Entering the real-time web - Understanding how companies engage their brands on the real-time web*

Dette speciale undersøger, hvordan real-time web påvirker virksomheders brand. Det allestedsnæværende internet samt de mange mennesker, der er tilstede i de sociale online sfærer, har fået virksomheder til at blive aktive på for eksempel Facebook og Twitter. Problemformuleringen, som ligger til grund for opgaven, lyder: "Hvilke muligheder og udfordringer møder virksomheder, når de engagerer deres brand på real-time web?". Ved at belyse det forholdsvis nye fænomen og gennem en analyse af virksomheders anvendelse af real-time web søger specialet at teste hypotesen: "Real-time web forstærker en tendens til en større forbrugerindflydelse på virksomheders brand – en indflydelse, som ændrer den måde, virksomheder relaterer sig til deres corporate brand og til forbrugerne. Den vedvarende forbrugerinvolvering stimuleres delvis af virksomhedernes brug af crowdsourcing".

For at besvare problemstillingen anvendes tre hovedteoretiske retninger: medium theory, brandingteori og sociologisk teori. Undersøgelsen er designet som et kvalitativt casestudie af henholdsvis SAS, Berlingske og Normann Copenhagen. Interviews med community managers i de tre respektive virksomheder udgør det primære datamateriale. Derudover bygger empirien på materiale fra Facebook og Twitter samt andre relevante blogs og nyhedsartikler.

Specialet konkluderer, at virksomheder ikke længere ”ejer” deres brand i samme grad som tidligere. Real-time webs hurtighed og interaktive karakteristika giver mennesker en større mulighed for at give deres mening til kende. Dette betyder, at virksomheder har mistet noget af kontrollen over deres brand. Samtidig konkluderes, at tabet af kontrol giver virksomhederne mulighed for at intensivere forbrugerernes involvering i deres brand. Med de traditionelle samfundsinstitutioners fald i senmoderniteten har brands som institution fået en central rolle i menneskers søgen efter identitet. For at stimulere denne proces har flere virksomheder ansat en community manager, hvis hovedopgave er at monitorere og facilitere kommunikationen mellem brand og forbrugerne og mellem forbrugerne. En metode til at intensivere relationerne mellem
forbrugerne og brands er crowdsourcing, der ikke kun fungerer som billig arbejdskraft, men også som et frugtbart redskab til at skabe dybere relationer mellem forbrugeren og brandet.

Høgni Reistrup, Københavns Universitet, 2010
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1 Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, the internet has expanded and developed with a speed that, in a media historical context, is unique compared to any other medium. Companies, institutions, and communities have embedded the medium into their practice, changing their structure in the process. Key social structures and activities are now centred on electronically based information networks. At both an organisational and an individual level, we have become dependant upon computer networks. The network architecture makes it difficult to maintain centralised control over information and the flow of communication.¹ The internet’s open communicative infrastructure has meant that, for example, small and large companies, educational institutions, and individual users have developed innovative and novel ways of using the medium. The real-time web, which is the key subject of this thesis, is one example of the internet’s open nature and is perhaps best exemplified by Facebook and Twitter. With the real-time web, the speed of communication has become – as the term indicates – close to real-time. The internet’s open infrastructure is a pivotal factor, which enables the participation of a large number of individuals. People can now read, share and shout about whatever they want.

The internet intervenes in the way companies, civil society and institutions organise themselves. As Tom Krazit (2010), writer for CNN, puts it when referring to how journalists work within the new media reality: “There's no going back to a delayed publishing model for media companies: deadlines are dead in the real-time world”. Not only has the journalistic field undergone changes. Companies also have to generate new behavioural patterns to adapt to the new reality. The real-time web has, for example, transformed the corporate realm by raising new demands for transparency. But what has facilitated these changes? An initial answer, which embraces the backbone of companies’ altered relation to the world outside, is the enhanced possibility that ordinary internet users have to express their views in the public domain. To give an example, Time Magazine’s Person of the year in 2006 was “You” (Grossman, 2006). This illustrates the impact that collaboration and user-generated content have had upon institutions and culture.

¹ No single body owns the internet and it is not controlled by a single authority. Rather it is a network of interconnected computers operating according to agreed protocols (McQuail, 2010: 40, 141).
Today people pass more time than ever before on the internet and a substantial part of their time is spent on the real-time web. Here people have a communicative platform for expressing both their delight and their displeasure about certain topics. In addition to altered media habits, companies, organisations and institutions also embed the internet into their practices. As such, the internet has not only altered the way we communicate but also changed the way our societies work and are organised. As Finnemann (2010: 109) has pointed out, the web makes up a new “underlying condition for the company and for its relations to the outside world” [my translation].

One topic that people talk about on the internet is companies and their products/services. Consequently, many firms today put an effort into enhancing their visibility on the web, for example by giving their brands a presence on the real-time web. Companies choose to establish a brand because there are competitive advantages connected with having one. In essence, having a brand is a way for a company to differentiate itself from competitors and make customers and other stakeholders feel they belong to the brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2008: 21). As such, brands also serve to create stickiness. Even if the internet has become widespread, the mass media are still an integral part of most companies’ approach to branding, as the mass media still play an important role in shaping corporate brands. New media, however, have given companies new tools with which to engage and activate customers in building their brands, as well as customers have gained an enhanced possibility of defining the brand. This observation is a key topic in this thesis.

Companies have to acknowledge that people do not join internet forums and debates just because they are there. People have inducements for being active on the real-time web. The large number of people contributing to the real-time web ecology indicates that the social sphere creates meaning. A part of the explanation might be, that 1) people decide when to contribute to the ongoing conversation within a network, 2) the entry threshold is lowered and 3) people can publish themselves as well as their network (Lister et al., 2009: 209). Changes in the overall media landscape have resulted in new ways of thinking about and relating to the corporate brand. Today, companies do not merely have websites, they have also started creating profiles on, for example, Facebook and Twitter. One reason, which is also the focus of this study,
is that companies have lost control over their brand partly due to active customers on the internet. At the same time, companies have developed new competencies and practices to regain this lost control. Companies that are active on online platforms engage customers in several ways – one of which is crowdsourcing. First and foremost, companies are present in the social sphere because it has some advantages compared to not being active.

The introduction is organised in three parts: the overall topic and problem statement, the inquiry’s design and composition, and an explanation of the scientific assumptions which underpin how the problem is addressed.

1.1 Problem area
Companies have always had an interest in building a specific and positive image of their own products and practices. Historically, companies’ engagement with brand management dates back to the 18th century (Arvidsson, 2006a: 66-67). Since the mid-1980s, however, “researchers and practitioners alike have explored the domain, scope and potential of the brand” (Heding, Knutzen & Bjerre, 2009: 3). All companies, today and in the past, aim to build strong reputations in the eyes of their stakeholders. Strong reputations lead to acceptance, which again leads to legitimacy (Cornelissen, 2008: 64). It is also worth taking into account that companies have been present on the internet since the medium started to emerge in the mid-1990s. Businesses operating on the internet and using a web strategy are therefore not a new phenomenon. What has changed is that companies’ web strategies have expanded beyond simple so-called homepages to a much more interactive and conversational use of the internet medium. The newly ubiquitous presence of the internet, along with its speed and interactive potential, which together make up the challenges and opportunities that companies face when trying to manage a strong company reputation, has led to changes in the way companies manage corporate branding. However, this does not suffice as an answer. Neither is the fact that the social activities occurring on the internet have gained immense popularity a viable explanation of why companies put an effort into the social spheres on the internet. These reflections raise a series of important questions. How can companies control their brands when the real-time web de facto opens up an information channel where
corporate identity is constantly challenged? How can companies project a particular corporate image when the real-time web interferes with the communication process? How can companies ensure preferred costumer interpretations when the real-time web makes information about the company more transparent? These are some of the questions that trigger my interest in examining the impact of the real-time web on the corporate brand.

On the web, people can articulate their dissatisfaction by sharing their attitude with other people. If someone is dissatisfied with or disappointed by a product or a company’s services, he or she can share that opinion and react to a business or a product on the internet. In principle, the voice of a single customer can be heard, and if there is a range of people that share the same attitude, they can have some clout in influencing a company’s brand/reputation. It is all about control, as Jeff Jarvis (2009: 11) has remarked: “the internet allows us to speak to the world, to organize ourselves, to find and spread information, to challenge old ways, to retake control.” This is consistent with James Slevin’s (2002: 10) observations of how the internet should be approached. The internet is not merely an alternative way of distributing information. It should also be seen as a way of creating new forms of interaction and action. There are a number of issues related to this approach. How do companies address the challenge of the real-time web and its decentralised division of power compared to older media? How does the real-time web phenomenon alter the way businesses do business? How do companies relate to the real-time web and this new means of communicating? And how does the phenomenon interfere with existing practices?

Which changes the real-time web has brought about in a company context is an empirical question that triggers a case study to answer it. Taking three cases: SAS, Berlingske\(^2\) and Normann Copenhagen, as the departing point, this thesis will examine the ways in which the real-time web alters companies’ relationship to their

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\(^2\) More specifically, Berlingske Tidende and the activities that are linked to the company’s offline and, particularly, online activities. Berlingske is part of Berlingske Media. When referring to Berlingske, I refer explicitly to the activities carried out by Berlingske Tidende, and not the entire Berlingske Media corporation.
brand. By studying the role of community managers\(^3\) in various industries, a coherent picture of the community manager’s relationship to the corporate brand and the characteristics of the real-time web may be elaborated on.

A vast amount of academic literature has been written about the internet as a phenomenon that widens the traditional concept of democracy and elicits new forms of public life. Lister et al. (2009: 218) have described this as a “deep running theme in net scholarship and public net discourse”. Scholars of media studies have examined the internet’s interactive potential for facilitating a dialogically mediated publicness, drawing on Habermas’ notion of the public sphere, which is based on rational critical debate. However, there is a lack of studies taking into account interactive patterns on the web, which shape how companies operate in their respective markets. Both perspectives presuppose that “the traditional filters and gatekeepers of mass media have been replaced by us” (ibid.: 200). On the one hand, there has been much talk about the new media, and about how companies can gain a competitive advantage by implementing new media tools in their business practice. On the other hand, there seems to be a lack of knowledge about how and why companies are affected by new media. This relatively unexplored research field, studying how businesses handle their corporate brand within the new media context, has prompted me to examine the subject in greater detail. The overriding aim of this thesis is to contribute to filling the gap in understanding of how the real-time web affects companies’ corporate brand practices. Consequently, what is being examined is the relationship between cause and effect when it comes to branding and the real-time web.

1.2 Problem statement
The thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

What are the opportunities and challenges that companies face when engaging their brand on the real-time web?

\(^3\) A community manager is a person within a company whose function, among others, is to monitor and facilitate the online talk about a company and its product and to engage in dialogue with users online (Owyang, 2006).
Furthermore, the aim of the thesis is to examine what opportunities and challenges the real-time web presents to companies by answering the following questions:

- How is the phenomenon of the real-time web to be understood?
- How does the real-time web influence companies’ branding practice?
- Why is the real-time web relevant for companies and their brands?

1.3 Hypothesis
In the problem statement above, I assume that the lowered barriers to publish in the media space have demanded from companies that they adjust their behaviour to a new reality. In this new media reality, the participatory nature of the real-time web contributes to the company’s overall narrative to such an extent that it influences the corporate brand. The point of departure is that companies have undergone changes influenced by: the increased amount of information about businesses on the internet; the augmented speed of communication, and the scope of the individual to influence the trajectory of a given topic. The underlying hypothesis of the dissertation can be summarised in the following sentence:

The real-time web amplifies a tendency towards greater consumer influence on companies and their brands - an influence which alters the way companies relate to their corporate brand and to consumers. This ongoing consumer involvement is partly stimulated by companies’ use of crowdsourcing.

The hypothesis has arisen from observing the growing participation by people online. Furthermore, the increased adoption of social media services on the internet, as well as the initiatives taken by companies towards greater engagement with their customers underpin my hypothesis. The Danish bank, Danske Bank, may be used as an example. Since the beginning of the financial crises, Danske Bank has experienced major problems with its reputation. An annual image analysis carried out by Berlingske Nyhedsmagasín, a Danish magazine owned by the media organisation Berlingske Media, showed that Danske Bank fell from being the sixth strongest Danish brand in 2008 down to 137 in 2009 (Otkjær, 2009). After this image crisis, the bank took measures to restore its corporate image. A pivotal part of this process was
the creation of an online platform on the company’s website, where customers were invited to share their thoughts about the bank. This was a huge initiative taken by a conservative bank that had been accused of being arrogant and untrustworthy. The bank encouraged the Danish population to say what ever they wanted on *their* platform by promoting the bank’s novel dialogical platform through an intense series of TV commercials. Danske Bank created its own platform allegedly, I would claim, because of an interest in maintaining control over the debate and to filter the answers submitted by its customers. Since then, however, the bank has established its own site on Facebook, perhaps because people already talk about the bank on the real-time web outside the bank’s domain, whether the bank likes it or not.

What the example above demonstrates is that the relationship between the company and its customers has changed. Whether or not the initiative was successful will not be examined here, but it reveals a tendency that makes up the thesis’ field of inquiry. Firstly, it shows that social activity, occurring online, can affect the way companies manage their brands. Secondly, the real-time web makes up a sphere where everyone can communicate with each other, resulting in a lack of central control and a tendency towards less predictability, as the example above illustrates.

**1.4 Delimitation of the inquiry**

What the real-time web makes explicit is the altered control patterns. In fact, companies cannot decide whether or not they wish to be present on the real-time web. Consumers already talk about companies on the internet, as do employees and competitors. Even though the internet enables companies to communicate in a new way with a variety of stakeholders, I will focus on the challenges and opportunities facing companies with regard to their customers and their corporate brands. Hence, the study does not take into consideration other stakeholders, albeit they are not ignored.

There is an ongoing discussion on the web and among practitioners about how to handle the overwhelming amount of information available on the internet. Professionals as well as academics have talked about the phenomenon as ‘information overload’ due to the ever-increasing volume of information becoming available.
online. Such professionals see too much information as a problem. Others have pointed in other directions. Clay Shirky (OreillyMedia, 2008), for example, has argued that the problem is not ‘information overload’ but filter failure. How to categorise and filter the massive increase in information on the internet is an interesting question, but the discussion of filtration systems will not be explored in this thesis.

Furthermore, the thesis will not delve into how people use services such as Twitter and Facebook. Even though the audience perspective is relevant for how companies use the real-time web and could contribute new knowledge, the audience perspective is omitted. Rather, the thesis focuses on the real-time web and the consequences for companies’ handling of their branding strategies in the new media sphere.

The 140-character limit on Twitter is also interesting in terms of the special conversational structure that it cultivates. Technical constrains create a distinct mode of communication. Evidence suggests that this affects the way people communicate, both in terms of which words are used and how people express themselves. The special codes and conventions that have developed on Facebook will not be examined. Even though this mode of communication could provide companies with a better understanding of how to interpret messages about their company, this thesis will not be examining these aspects in depth.

1.5 Scientific approach
This thesis adopts a hermeneutic approach to its field of inquiry. Originally, hermeneutics was concerned with religious and legal texts, but the concept of text now also includes conversation and action (Kvale, 1997: 56). The humanities seek deeper understanding of humans’ activities and the products of those activities. These phenomena have meaning, as they are the product of humans, which have intentions and purposes (Pahuus, 2005: 140). As such, all human activity has an intentional character. To understand these intentions, the hermeneutic process seeks a contextualised interpretation of symbolic forms. The interpretation of a text appears as a circular movement between single parts and the whole, also called the hermeneutic circle (ibid.: 145). Hermeneutic scholars take for granted that
interpretation is an integral part of the scientific process (Drotner, Bruhn Jensen, Poulsen, Schrøder, 1996: 90), hence interpretation of meaning is a central theme within the hermeneutic tradition. Drawing on Gadamar’s basic idea in Wahrheit und Methode (1960), meaning is not seen as a static phenomenon as the interpreter brings some assumptions and expectations to the field of study which he or she seeks to understand (Pahuus, 2005: 150-151). Meaning is socially embedded and is constantly renewed and transformed by interpretation and reinterpretation (Thompson, 1995: 41-42). Hermeneutics claims that the foundation of humanities is interpretation. Hermeneutics however does not reject the natural sciences’ ideals of objectivity and their attempt to continually uncover more general and deeper components of the subject field (Pahuus, 2005: 165). Therefore, one crucial point is that all forms of interpretation occur systematically and that there is a constant hermeneutic self-reflection where the interpreter reflects on his or her own preconceptions (Gripsrud, 2002: 157; Kvale, 1997: 59).

1.6 Thesis design and composition
In what follows, I will provide a thesis overview. Chapter 2 outlines the nature of the real-time web. It is a relatively new phenomenon with a lack of academic examination as well as there has been a shortcoming in the understanding of the phenomenon’s general characteristics. A comprehensive introduction to the real-time web will therefore be given, as this is necessary for better understanding of how corporate brands are affected by internet users. Chapter 3 seeks to put forward the method that informs the inquiry and it describes and argues for the inquiry’s overall research design, including the case-study approach and its representativeness. In Chapter 4, the theoretical approach will be presented and discussed as a framework for the analysis. Chapter 5 outlines the results of the investigation with the purpose of informing the reader of the results from the data collected. Chapter 6 sums up the research project and revisits the aim stated in the introductory chapter.
2 The real-time web

This chapter seeks to describe the distinctive characteristics of the real-time web. Firstly, I will give a detailed description of the real-time web concept before outlining how the phenomenon can be seen in relation to other media technologies. I will draw on Bordewijk and Kaam’s (1986) model of four idealised information traffic patterns and Jens F. Jensen’s amplified version of the model to crystallise the real-time web’s specific characteristics. The model also enables a comparison to be made between the unique nature of the real-time web and other media technologies.

2.1 Conceptual clarification

The main platform under study is Facebook, a social media platform used by thousands of companies worldwide, including SAS, Berlingske and Normann Copenhagen. Facebook may be categorised as a social networking site (SNS), while Twitter, another service that is also used by many companies including the three case study companies, may be categorised as a microblogging service. Both Facebook and Twitter are part of the online social media sphere. The term “real-time web” enables a more distinctive characterisation of how the web is evolving. The concept includes both the social – or interactive - aspects and the instant communication that characterises Facebook and Twitter. As Kaplan & Haenlein (2010: 64-65) have argued, the social sphere on the web is an active and fast-moving domain. The services might not be a fad, nevertheless new and enhanced services are likely to emerge that will change the online media landscape. The real-time web is a phenomenon that encompasses all social media services that utilise the speed of communication and the interactive characteristics of the internet.

The real-time web is a relatively new phenomenon that has been mounting in popularity since 2009 with a growing interest from media, professionals and investors (Fromm, 2009). There have been different suggestions as to how to name the phenomenon. Some have favoured ‘now media’ and others ‘real-time stream’.

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4 Facebook had over 500 million registered users in July 2010 (Zuckerberg, 2010) and Twitter 145 million users in September 2010 (van Grove, 2010). It is important to bear in mind that the number of registered users does not say anything about how many are active, and how and why they are active on Facebook and Twitter.
However, there is now a consensus among practitioners and users to favour the term “real-time web” (ibid.). Although there seems to be an acceptance of the term “real-time web”, there is a number of different definitions outlining the term.

The real-time web is often described within a stream discourse. People use phrases such as “flood of updates”, “dip the toes into the stream” and “jump into the stream”. These figures of speech may aid an understanding of the phenomenon. A metaphor is said to *frame* the way we look at a given phenomenon and it thereby prevents us from getting an overall view (Morgan, 2006: 337; Jensen, 1999: 35). A metaphor is active and a constitutive force that constructs the object and leads to an enactment of the world in a particular manner (Morgan, 2006: 417). As such, the metaphor often reduces complexity (ibid.: 343). The real-time web is no exception as it is a multifaceted concept with different dimensions. In what follows, I will examine the real-time web phenomenon to identify its distinctive characteristics, keeping in mind the metaphor that dominates the concept.

Even though there are several ways of defining the real-time web, I will delimit it to human activities occurring on SNS and microblogging services. These services have implemented a technology that enables information to be received as soon as it is produced. Twitter and Facebook are examples of the real-time web. Colloquially, these services provide communications with others in a constant flow of up-to-the-second feed, where content is structured by *nowness* (Schonfeld, 2009). A large number of services have been developed that build on the Twitter platform. As I will outline further below, these services may be characterised as the *second layer* of the real-time web. In essence, these services utilise the information that people produce on Twitter. Because of Facebook’s current privacy policy, most of the information is kept within a limited network. Facebook is recurrently changing its policy to make more information public by default. Because of Facebook’s privacy constraints, services building on the real-time web manly utilise *tweets*.

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5 Google, for example, has launched real-time search, enabling users to search the web for content the same instant as it is published. Essentially, the technology aggregates information from services such as Twitter, MySpace and Facebook, using time as the structuring filter.

6 I.e. texts produced on Twitter.
2.2 The two layers of the real-time web

I consider it important to distinguish between two different layers of the real-time web: an interactive resource vs. a transmitter of messages. In the first layer, people are enabled to send and receive messages, without delay, in a public space. The second layer is characterised by technologies that draw on the information that is produced in the first layer. The main difference is their interactive potential.

When this distinction is made, it becomes clear that it is not sufficient to describe the real-time web as a “flow of conversation that is more like face-to-face interaction” (Tinfoilhatful, 2009). Or as stated by Paul Buchheit, co-founder of the social network aggregator FriendFeed, “It's similar to the difference between a phone call and a series of voice mails” (Kirkpatrick, 2009). Both layers of the real-time web imply that the gap between the sending and receiving of a message is minimised, hence making it a synchronous form of communication. The first layer of the real-time web is similar to face-to-face interaction and telephone conversations in terms of its interactive nature, the difference being that messages are public and are part of a larger network. Furthermore, the concept differs from face-to-face interaction, as it is not tied to particular spatial-temporal localities. My focus is on the first layer of the real-time web. However, if we briefly look at the second - the services that aggregate real-time data - it utilises the speed of the telephone and instant messaging (IM), but is merely based on transmission and therefore does not use the conversational patterns of the first layer. These technologies cumulatively generate vast amounts of information from Twitter and Facebook, making the second layer the information assembler par excellence. This might explain why the real-time web has been embedded in a stream discourse. Schonfeld (2009), among others, has made this explicit by posing the question, “How do you keep from drowning in the deluge?” When referring to the real-time web in this thesis, only the first layer is included in the definition of the concept.

In essence, what makes up the real-time web and enables a harvesting of the concept is the information that is produced and published on services such as Facebook and Twitter. It follows that social activities occurring online are the backbone of the term. This is also in line with what Pete Cashmore (2009), founder and CEO of the acknowledged social media blog Mashable, states is the driving force behind the real-
time web trend. According to Cashmore, the lowering of barriers to create content on
the web is the main impetus behind the rise of real-time web. Services such as Twitter
and Facebook enable people to publish their thoughts online and thereby inform one
another. It is relatively effortless to create content and therefore people become
conditioned to publishing and participating (ibid.).

In a company context, the real-time web strengthens the ability to listen, take action,
respond to, and to change circumstances, as companies are automatically notified
when something occurs. Or as Ross (2009) puts it: “The lag time between question-
and-answer and between customer response and company reaction is the arbitrage
opportunity for many businesses today”. As stated in the quote, the speed of
information is a key factor forming the real-time web concept. A good example of
how the real-time web differs from other media technologies is the Hudson River
plane crash from January 2009. Like other major news stories in recent years, the
incident first appeared on Twitter and not on the traditional media channels (Saxberg
& Saxberg, 2009: 19).

2.3 Push and pull technologies
Electronic mass media are the archetypal push media, i.e. a model based on the
assumption that “the information source comes to you” (Jensen, 1999: 33). With the
real-time web, people push their thoughts online. When content is pushed to the
browser, it becomes instantly available. Traditionally, websites are updated not more
than a few times during the day. This also applies to RSS feeds.⁷ They have been used
to tailor content to suit the users. Instead of browsing web sites, RSS feeds
automatically inform when new content is posted (Dwyer, 2010: 51). However, the
service collects information only from specific sites periodically and pushes it to
subscribers. In a way, RSS feeds have to ask a node if there are new messages, while
real-time web messages are delivered automatically and immediately. Overall, the
relatively static publication rhythm on the web has altered. Users of the real-time web
do not have to refresh pages to see when new content is available - notifications are
pushed to the user without delay. While the internet is a pull-medium, it also enables a
mixture of push and pull services (Jensen, 2003: 205). This also applies to the real-

⁷ Really Simple Syndication.
time web, where users can decide which information is to be pushed to them. Hence, the real-time web makes it possible for individuals to create personalised services. The fact that information becomes available as soon as it is published is something companies can use to monitor the real-time web and thereby get an idea of the zeitgeist. Companies can learn from consumers and potential customers by listening and engaging in the dialogue. The real-time web enables companies to drill down for more information on a specific topic.

2.4 Information traffic patterns

Bordewijk and Kaam (1986) have developed a model with four idealised information traffic patterns. In this section, the real-time web will be considered through the lens of Bordewijk and Kaam’s typology. The conceptual framework is based on different power relationships between information providers and users without taking into account media content, technical design and forms of presentation (Drotner, Kline, Murray & Schröder, 2003: 366). The four patterns which relate to production and control between providers and users are: “allocation”, “conversation”, “consultation”, and “registration”. Bordewijk and Kaam’s model is related to two variables: the central versus individual control of information, and the central versus individual control of time and choice of subject (McQuail, 2010: 147).

2.4.1 Allocation

With “allocation”, information is produced and distributed from a central information provider to many peripheral receivers. The information flow is unidirectional and there is an asymmetrical power relationship in terms of control over the media output (Jensen, 1999: 37). This pattern applies to, for example, traditional public service broadcasting media such as television and radio, where the communication is typically one-to-many, and the sender determines time and place of communication (McQuail, 2010: 146).8

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8 Overall, traditional mass media have become more interactive with the spreading of the internet. The commercialisation of the media marked in Europe, especially in the 1980s, has also altered the media landscape, for example by introducing audience analysis to the field of public service broadcasting.
2.4.2 Conversation
“Conversation” is the reciprocal flow of interaction that occurs in telephone conversations and computer-mediated-communication (CMC). Its pattern is in direct opposition to “allocution”. With “conversation”, individuals can interact directly with each other, like nodes in a network. As Jensen (2003: 23) observes, the network is interconnected in such a manner that each node is connected to all other nodes. Individuals are also equal participants, bypassing the centre. Universal connectivity provided by the internet is an example of this information pattern (McQuail, 2010: 542). Individuals furthermore decide the time, place and topic of communication, making the allocation of power asymmetrical and decentred (ibid.: 146). Many services on the internet may be described as conversation-driven media, for example Facebook and Twitter (Spurgeon, 2008: 10).

2.4.3 Consultation
“Consultation” occurs when individuals seek out information produced/owned by a central store, but where the individual decides what information to receive and when to receive it. Newspapers and Magazines draw on this communication pattern, as “consumers exercise programmatic control in selecting information from a predetermined menu of content” (Spurgeon, 2008: 5).

2.4.4 Registration
“Registration” refers to situations in which a centre collects information from the periphery i.e. the users of a given medium. New media technologies make registration more feasible. Media that draw on the registration pattern typically monitor a communication process with a variety of tracking devices. Here, information and communications systems allow for an enhanced surveillance of the behaviour of individuals on the internet (Arvidsson, 2006a: 129).

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9 To exemplify, Facebook and LinkedIn use relationship patterns between connections or “friends” to suggest to other people that a person may want to associate with or befriend. Amazon has also been hugely successful with the company’s data-mining engine, which saves people’s searches, correlates what a person searches for with what other users search for, and makes personal recommendations based on that (Spurgeon, 2008: 88).
2.5 The third dimension

Even though Bordewijk and Kaam’s model is a useful framework when outlining the characteristics of a service or medium, we must focus on an elaboration of internet services based on interactive protocols. In addition to who delivers, who controls access to, and the use of the information, Jensen (1999: 42) sketches a third dimension, based on a medium’s temporal conditions. Jensen (1999) characterises media technologies in relation to the degree of synchronous vs. asynchronous communication. In what follows, I will apply this model to the real-time web phenomenon.

In a media historical perspective, face-to-face interaction is the first synchronous form of communication. Communication technologies such as the telephone and IM are also synchronous, as people can respond immediately after or even during the process of receiving a message. What enables synchronous communication is a temporal 1:1 relationship. Face-to-face communication builds on the assumption that sender and receiver are present in the same physical location. Other synchronous forms of communication transcend this limitation. Besides telephone and IM, television and radio are examples of synchronous forms of communication. Even though electronic media, such as television and radio, enable simultaneity over distance as people may act immediately on a message, recipients’ ability to respond to an electronic media message differs from other forms of synchronous communication. Electronic mass
media inherently set up an asymmetrical sender-receiver relationship. They are most commonly non-dialo\-gical in character, as there is a gap between the producer and the receiver of information (Slevin, 2000: 183).

The real-time web is largely interactive and synchronous, thus placing the medium within the synchronous conversation field (Fig. 1). Besides being interactive and hence quite unlike traditional mass media, the real-time web enables a shift of power to the user, as the user decides when to use the medium and communicate synchronously with other users or nodes in the network (van Dijk, 2006: 8). Following Sheizaf Rafaeli’s definition of interactivity,\textsuperscript{10} interactivity is a central concept for understanding new media (Flew, 2005: 13). As Jenkins (2006: 133) has observed, it is fruitful to distinguish between human interaction and non-human interaction. Jenkins (2006) proposes ‘participation’ to differentiate human interaction from mere computer interaction, which is based on algorithmic characteristics. It is not as much the closed system of non-human interaction that shapes the real-time web as the hermeneutical human interaction (or participation) that requires interpretation. In addition to being synchronous, the real-time web is a conversational medium, in that it sets up a reciprocal relationship between two or more people. Spurgeon (2008: 7) describes the conversational pattern as a “highly dynamic form of communication” that involves “complex activities of listening, reciprocal turn-taking and the negotiated management of control over conversation”. Conversations are thus inherently open-ended, placing the user in the centre of production of media content.

Overall, there is a shift in the power balance from sender to receiver, which challenges the old sender-receiver dichotomy (McQuail, 2010: 148; Slevin, 2000: 75). The idealised model (Fig. 1) helps one to grasp which dimensions are involved in the different forms of mediated interactivity. The typology reveals the power structure that lies beneath the flow of information and whether the power structure is reinforced or transformed. Even though the internet is seen as dialogic and not as a transmitting medium, there are also opposite tendencies. As stated by McQuail (2010: 146), in relation to the conversational pattern, “at some point, increased scale of participation leads to a merger with the allocutive situation”. This stresses that the frontiers in the

\textsuperscript{10} Defined as “the extent to which communication reflects back on itself, feeds on and responds to the past” (Flew, 2005: 13).
model are fluid in practice. Furthermore, most communication services and networks possess multiple patterns of information flows and interaction (Spurgeon, 2008: 7). On the real-time web, individuals can create conversations, influence the information pattern and contribute new input. The amount of information that can be produced might however lead it towards the allocution pattern. Figure 1 therefore represents an idealised model that can elucidate the real-time web’s characteristics, but it also shows that the real-time web is a multi-patterned service, where several tendencies occur simultaneously. Nevertheless, the typology is an appropriate tool to describe and analyse new web services and to understand information traffic patterns (Jensen, 1999: 62). The typology above all shows the shift in power relationships in terms of time, topic and place of communication, and it points towards an increased possibility for non-transmitting modes of interactivity.

In this chapter, I have elucidated the specific characteristics of the real-time web. Bordewijk and Kaam’s model reveals the multi-layered change which the internet has enabled, making it clear that “unlike audiences, users not only attend but also activate” (Bardoel & Lowe, 2007: 17). The boundary between the author-as-user and user-as-reader is porous on the internet. The typology makes the differences between electronic and new media more visible. Overall, there is a shift from a centre of production to a decentralised production practice, thereby lowering the entry barriers. The real-time web is an example of a medium where barriers are lowered and speed is extended, just as it is an example of an interactive technology. For the same reason, the real-time web presents opportunities and challenges for companies, institutions, and culture per se.
3 Method

This chapter describes the detailed research procedure that the investigation behind my research question is based on, that is: What are the opportunities and challenges that companies face when engaging their brand on the real-time web? To enable an analysis of how the real-time web changes companies’ approach to their brand, an investigation of community managers\(^{11}\) may serve as a fruitful approach. This thesis uses multiple case studies for research proposes. Besides three qualitative interviews with community managers in three different companies, I have also conducted two interviews with people working in media monitoring bureaus. In the following sections, I will describe the method behind my research. I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages related to the chosen method; I will also argue for the data collected and the inquiry’s validity and reliability. Furthermore, I will outline how and why a certain method is used in the data processing: i.e. the form of transcription, meaning condensation, and meaning categorisation. The last part of this chapter will argue for the application of the chosen theories.

3.1 Research design

The thesis takes an explorative approach in order to answer the problem statement posed in the Introduction. This means that the empirical material has partly driven my choice of theory as well as the analytical strategy. The primary aim of the inquiry’s explorative approach has been to discover new dimensions of the studied subject during the investigation process. To achieve this aim I have been open to new inputs and findings throughout the study. In what follows, I will lay out the purpose and setting of the case studies as well as how the research has been conducted.

3.1.1 Case study

To address the research question, a multiple-case study is chosen. The presence of brands on the real-time web can be characterised as a complex social phenomenon, and this has been the underlying premise that has triggered my use of the case study

\(^{11}\) The job title for the person interviewed at Normann Copenhagen was *brand manager*. For the sake of clarification I will use the term *community manager* for all three persons.
method. Furthermore, there is no literature or prior investigation that examines the opportunities and challenges that companies face when present on the real-time web. This means that the basis for comparison is non-existent in terms of prior investigations. A multiple-case study can therefore contribute to knowledge of the mechanisms that affect companies’ behaviour on the real-time web. Punch (quoted in Silverman, 2005: 126) argues that the general objective of a case study is to develop as full an understanding of the case as possible. Since the investigation focuses on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, I have chosen an explanatory case study approach where how and why questions are posed. This method also allows for a holistic approach to real-life events and involves a diversified number of factors in order to reveal the complex and larger picture that emerges. My research is therefore not determined by a set of a priori factors, but rather takes into account, as Creswell (2007: 39) states it: “the complex interactions of factors in any situation”.

### 3.1.2 The selected cases

In the following part, I will outline the rationale for doing a multiple-case study. I have chosen a multiple-case study over a single-case design, as the analytical benefits from having more than one case may be substantial in real-life situations. When doing a multiple-case study, the evidence is often considered to be more compelling (Yin, 2003: 46). I have chosen to examine three cases in depth. The cases are first and foremost chosen as they can answer the research question posed. Here it is important to notice that each case is treated separately, even though the case is a part of a larger, multiple-case study. This is also in line with Patton’s (1980: 340) notion that “initially each case must be represented and understood as an idiosyncratic and unique phenomenon”. The aim is to discover patterns of findings across multiple cases. Hence each community manager is the subject of an individual case study, and together the cases make up a multiple-case design. Creswell (2007: 76) argues that the more cases are involved in a study, the less depth there will be in any single study.

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12 According to Yin (2003: 2), the need for a case study method arises when the researcher has an interest in understanding “complex social phenomena”.

13 According to Yin (2003: 7) identifying the type of questions to ask is highly important when deciding which research strategy to apply.

14 As Patton (1980: 40) puts it, “each case, event, or setting being studied is treated as a unique entity with its own particular meaning and constellation of relationships emerging from and related to the context within which it exists”.

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According to Caswell, more than one case will dilute the overall analysis. He is right that doing a multiple case study will reduce the depth of each analysis, as there will be less time to investigate and flesh out each case. Therefore the rationale behind the sampling strategy is crucial if the selection of three cases is to be justified. The rationale will be outlined below.

In the following section, I will argue for the underlying criteria for selecting Normann Copenhagen, Berlingske, and SAS as case studies. I have first and foremost chosen these companies because they have chosen to be active on the real-time web and because they have invested in people with new social media skills. This is why I have interviewed key persons, whose working practice is shaped by the real-time web. Even though all companies do not use the term community manager to describe the work function, I have selected these specific companies because they have employed persons that can handle communication with customers on the internet. In general, there does not seem to be a consensus surrounding how to name the community manager. A quote by the community manager at Berlingske will infuse the point with more clarity:

"...they advertised some new positions that were to be part of the news room, that is a community developer that I now am... a so-called community manager. My first act was to change the name of the title, because developer makes it sound hi-tech and it isn't." (Appendix: 2)

The demand for professionals with special skills within new social media is relatively new, and this is also part of the explanation why the area is yet somewhat blurred.

The context of the three cases differs to some extent. One could argue that this weakens the study as each case can be said to be unique. The cases were selected because of their similarities even if they have their own specific characteristics. For the same reason, I will outline why the three cases make up the empirical material. All three companies, besides being commercial entities, operate within the business-to-consumer area. Furthermore, all three companies are active on both Twitter and

15 This is also consistent with the humanistic view that every situation is unique, and that every situation has its own structure and inner logic (Kvale, 1997: 227).
Facebook. The variety in size has been a parameter behind the selection of case studies, and therefore I have selected three companies with different numbers of employees. SAS employs 15,000 people, Berlingske 2,850 and Normann Copenhagen 55. The fact that three companies with this variety in size spend time and money on the real-time web indicates that the size of the company is not necessarily the determining factor when companies chose to engage with their customers online. I could have selected three other cases with the same criteria, i.e. size and companies employing a community manager. If we look at three other companies located in Denmark: Danske Bank, TV2, and Bruuns Bazaar, with respectively 24,000, 1100, and 160 employees, these companies are rather similar to the chosen cases as they have employed a community manager and are also active on the real-time web. If we look at the three cases used in this thesis, they all attempt to promote a positive image of the company on the internet. This in itself is not unique, but they permit an accessibility that does not have its parallels in the companies’ history. The companies seek dialogue in their attempt to come closer to their customers and vice versa. All three companies have furthermore been publicly recognised as good examples of how businesses can create new relationships with their customers on the real-time web.

Despite their, in many respects, heterogeneous composition, these companies use the real-time web in a way that reveals repetitive patterns across the three cases. As I will drill down into in the following part, this does however limit the generalisability of the study.16

As elaborated above, there are challenges related to the generalisation of the three chosen cases. There will always be some variation from one case to another. Gerring (2007: 76) argues that case studies seek both to find and uncover something particular and to identify something more general. As Stake (2008: 125) notices: “damage occurs when the commitment to generalize or to theorize runs so strong that the researcher’s attention is drawn away from features important for understanding the case itself”. In the following part, I will outline the investigation’s validity and reliability bearing in mind the uniqueness of each case.

16 “Generalisability” is the extent to which the research’s results apply to a wider context than just the original study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).
The subject of this part is to outline the question of verification. One objective of the inquiry has been to construct the study comprehensibly to ensure validity and reliability. To fulfil the requirement of validity, I have sought to describe the subject field as thoroughly, systematically, and as accurately as possible. However, it is difficult to legitimise a single representation as a criterion for accurate measurement. There is always the risk of selecting only a few exemplary instances, leaving out the accuracy of the conclusion. Silverman (2005: 211) refers to this as “anecdotalism”. To get over this hurdle, I have used data triangulation as a validation method. This means that I have used multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. The interviews with the community managers have been the primary source. To enlarge the empirical scope of the investigation, I have taken into account the broader context of each case in order to get multiple sources of information that are rich in context. This also emphasises the holistic approach of the thesis’s problem statement. Besides interviews with community managers, I have used the companies’ appearance on the real-time web as empirical data. Furthermore, relevant interviews, articles and texts from the mass media as well as from internet sites have been included in the data gathering process. The empirical material will be sketched out in chapter 3.2 – 3.2.3.

All sources of evidence have been reviewed and analysed together in order to find repetitive patterns of information from different sources so as to establish converging lines of inquiry. When varied methods of data collection yield similar findings on the same research subject, the findings may be judged as valid (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002: 240; Gillham, 2000: 13). Therefore, if different research methods are used to study the same problem and these methods appear to lead to the same results then the inquiry’s validity is increased. I have had this principle in mind throughout the study, so as to map out more fully the complexity and the patterns of the subject under study. Hence, when it has been possible, I have included several views on the same subject, in order to establish convergence of meaning from different sources.

If the case study is approached wearing positivistic glasses, it is impossible to generalise by using the case study method. The aim, however, of case studies is not to

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17 Patton (1980: 305) refers to this method as a cross-validation of findings, patterns, and conclusions.
make statistical generalisations but to rely on analytical generalisations, where the results from one inquiry can function as a guideline in another situation. This means that the investigator strives to “generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory” (Yin, 2003: 37). If the empirical results from one case support the results in others, the potential for generalisation increases. The analysis of the similarities and the differences in the three cases will decide the analytical generalisation that can be made, stating to what extent the findings in one case also occur in the rest.

By documenting the procedures followed in the conduct of the case studies, my aim has been to enable researchers to repeat the study and arrive at the same findings. Thereby I seek to avoid errors and bias in the study. This ensures reliability as the results can be evaluated in terms of their consistency when there is transparency in all stages of the inquiry. To ensure reliability, it has been vital not only to look for similarities within and across the cases, but also to be open to contrary findings. The intention has been to make all procedures and processes as explicit as possible in order for the study to be based on accuracy and to make it valid and reliable.

3.1.4 Analysis of data
The main objective of this part is to explain how the collected data has been treated. This is an important link in the process of drawing conclusion based on the empirical investigations. To get an overview of the interviews with the community managers, I have used a phenomenologically inspired method where the sum of the data has been reduced to its essence, thereby assembling the interviews’ single parts. In this process, general traits and patterns in the empirical material are sought out with the aim of identifying the phenomenon’s being (Kvale, 1997: 62). In other words, what stays constant under different variations is the phenomenon’s being. Hence, causal factors associated with the observed phenomenon are identified and general traits in the empiric material are identified. In practical terms, the interviews have been meaning categorised and condensed systematically. This entails using a meaning condensation and categorisation method in the analysis of data so that converging lines of inquiry as well as patterns in the empirical material can be uncovered.
3.2 The empirical foundation

Even though I have used multiple data collection methods, the single most informative source of information has been the case studies’ qualitative interviews with the three community managers. Having explained the underlying premises in doing a multiple-case study and following the elaboration of the validity and reliability of the research, I will now turn to the data gathering approaches, collection procedures, and the empirical sources that inform the thesis.

3.2.1 Qualitative interviews

There has traditionally been a polarised dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative methods. Kvale (1997: 76) among others has argued for a more pragmatic approach, where qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined as well as used separately. He argues that: “their [i.e. qualitative and quantitative methods] usability lies in their ability to answer the research question posed” [my translation] (ibid.: 77). In this thesis I have made use only of qualitative methods, one of which is the qualitative interview. There is a set of considerations related to the method that I will outline in the following parts. Gillham (2000: 65) notices that if the qualitative interviews in a case study are well carried out “it can be the richest single source of data”. As the in depth interviews with the community managers have been the single most important source of information about the subject field being studied, there will be a focus on the knowledge that was collected by interviewing these key persons and their understanding and experience of the real-time web in their respective companies.

3.2.1.1 Carrying out the interviews

The interviews with the three community managers were conducted between June 21 – June 25, 2010. The people interviewed were Michael Rying, brand manager at Normann Copenhagen; Christina Ericsson, Director of Online Strategy & Communications at SAS, and Astrid Haug, Community Manager at Berlingske. The initial contact to the community managers occurred via e-mail where I gave a tentative explanation of the purpose of the study and my interest in doing an interview with the person in question. The interview settings were also arranged through e-mail
correspondence. Beside information about the project I also offered to send the interview guide to the people to be interviewed before the interview was carried out.  

As a supplement to the analysis, I have conducted two interviews with professionals working within media monitoring bureaus. The first interview was a telephone interview with Jon Anders Tangnes at Opoint in Oslo. It was conducted on June 22 and the second interview was with Morten Viktor at InfoMedia in Copenhagen on September 28. These two interviews should mainly be seen as generating background information.

3.2.1.2 Design of the interview guide
Well-planned procedures are pivotal before, during, and after the collection of data. Patton (1980: 200) has argued that due to the limited time available in an interview situation, it is preferable to prepare an interview guide that can help ensure that important questions are posed. I have developed a semi-structured interview guide with a detailed order of standard formulated questions, which could be answered in face-to-face settings as well as in a telephone interview. The interview guide can be found in the appendix. Although the questions were structured beforehand, there was a certain degree of flexibility in terms of the sequence of the questions. Furthermore I was open to framing new questions in the course of the interviews. This was done to enable the interviewer to ask in detail about relevant information that came to the fore during the interview. In general, all three interviews focused principally on the challenges as well as the opportunities resulting from the companies’ online presence. The semi-structured interview guide enabled the conversation to go in unforeseen directions – and still be relevant to the investigation.  

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18 I did not experience any trouble getting a face-to-face interview with Berlingske and a telephone interview with SAS situated in Stockholm. Normann Copenhagen on the other hand set out some requirements before I could conduct the interview mainly because Normann Copenhagen receives a considerable number of applications from students that want to use Normann Copenhagen as a case study. For the same reason, I agreed to pass my transcription, interview guide and the thesis’ conclusion to the company.

19 The semi-structured interview guide also enabled me to conduct all three interviews with the community managers within an hour, which was the duration that I had informed the participants about beforehand. All interviews with the community managers lasted between 50-55 minutes. The interviews with the persons working at media monitoring bureaus lasted between 20-30 minutes.
If we look at the interview techniques used, one important aspect has been not to pose “why” questions explicitly, but rather focus on “how” questions. This has been done to neutralise the interviewer’s role and to avoid defensiveness on the informant’s part, while maintaining a friendly tone (Becker, 1998: 58-60; Yin, 2003: 90). Throughout the interviews, I have sought to avoid leading questions, as this may create biases in the final results. Kvale (1997: 231) also points out that when leading questions are avoided, the study’s reliability is strengthened.

3.2.1.3 The interview situation
In my case studies, I have found it important to observe the research objects carefully to identify causal factors associated with the field of study. However events occur within a real-life context, which create challenges as data is being collected in peoples’ everyday situations and not within a controlled environment such as a laboratory. As Yin (2003: 72) notices, when key persons are interviewed, the interviewer has to adjust to the schedules of the person being interviewed. Therefore it is likely that the researcher is more constrained than the interview object. This also reflects the very fact that the nature of an interview is open-ended, even though the interview is structured to some extent to get the data that will shed light on the research question. The interviewer has to be flexible before as well as during the interview.

Given the relatively short time in which to conduct the interview, it was important to create trust initially in the interview situation so the interviewee could talk freely and without constraints. Patton (1980: 36) argues that it is important to get close enough to the interviewee to be able to get access to in-depth and detailed accounts given by the persons being interviewed. To gain as much insight into the life world of the interviewee, I furnished the interviewee with all the relevant information about my inquiry before the interview began. This was done to stress the openness of the study and to make visible its aim. The interview began with a request to describe the person’s professional background and a typical day at work. As Kvale (1997: 132) argues, the first minutes of an interview are crucial. Trust between the interviewer and the interviewee is established at the beginning of an interview, and these minutes can affect the overall outcome of the interview. The initial question posed was a fruitful
way to start the interview, as the interviewees could talk freely about their work experiences and routines and reflect on their everyday work that often does not become explicitly verbalised in a hectic work situation. Furthermore the second question\(^{20}\) elicited some answers as to what the interviewee considered important. These answers have been used as a context in the analysis of the interviews.

As Kvale (ibid.) has pointed out, an interview can vary on an intellectual-emotional dimension scale. In my case, there has been clear tendency towards a rational logical discourse, where the people interviewed have reflected on their experiences as professionals. In contrast with, for example, focus groups where the primary aim is to collect intuitive reactions to a certain subject or phenomenon, the persons interviewed in this research talked about their own experiences on a subject about which they had in-depth knowledge.

### 3.2.1.4 Transcribing the interviews

All the interviews were audio recorded digitally. I did not experience any resistance from the interviewees to being recorded. Furthermore, all the interviewees appeared comfortable with the situation – most likely because of their previous experiences with interviews both in media settings as well as with students drawing on their experiences for their empirical research.

The interviews have been transcribed as they occurred, if not verbatim. I have refrained transcribing phrases where I have added information not of direct relevance to the thesis. Here it is important to bear in mind the purpose of the transcribed interviews: they are a means of documenting the empirical collection, to make visible the procedure used in the data collection, and to make available the data for subsequent reinterpretation, which ensures the reliability of the study. Furthermore, the interviews are transcribed for analytical purposes to enable an efficient recall of data in order to gain insight into the interviewees’ experiences. The transcriptions are, in contrast to sociolinguistic or psychological analyses, not made in order to analyse the interview situation as such. Therefore, I have refrained from transcribing gesture

\(^{20}\) How would you describe a typical day at work?
and emotional tone of voice during the conversation. This has been assessed as insignificant in the interpretation of the empirical material. Here it is also worth mentioning that the interviews have been conducted in Scandinavian so as to get as pluralistic a description as possible from the persons interviewed whose native language was Danish, Swedish or Norwegian. Even though some of the people interviewed speak English fluently, my initial approach has been that the interviewees’ experience was best described in their native language just to make sure that the English language was not a barrier to their explanations. This dictates that the transcribed interviews be in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian. Quotes used in the thesis have been translated into English, but appear in the interviewee’s native language in the appendix.

3.2.2 Conversations on the real-time web
When examining companies’ experiences with the real-time web’s opportunities and challenges, I have considered it instructive to take into account the companies’ actual presence on the real-time web. Specifically, this has meant that I have aggregated material from Facebook and Twitter, as these are currently the social media platforms where all three companies are present. Due to a relatively large amount of data accessible on the real-time web about these companies, I have chosen to focus on the companies’ own sites, created by the companies themselves. Furthermore I have selected a variety of examples of the companies’ dialogue and communications on the real-time web as empirical material for research purposes. I have not used all the material that is being produced on these sites, as several conversations and a great deal of company information are produced every day – and the amount is constantly evolving. However, a significant amount of information from the real-time web has been used, which I assess to represent the companies’ presence on the real-time web. Print screens from Facebook and Twitter appear unedited. An English translation of the posts written in Scandinavian may be found in the appendix.

3.2.3 Coverage in press and on the web
To get an empirical foundation rich in context, I have chosen to include press coverage and other forms of journalistic work in my empirical material as I see this as a relevant part of the subject field. I have also included other forms of media coverage
where Normann Copenhagen, Berlingske and SAS, to a varied degree, have had control of the media output. Primary access to this information has been through searches on Google.

3.3 Chosen theory

In this final part of this chapter, I will outline the theory that informs the inquiry. As McQuail has noted, media studies is a field of research that deals with a diverse and continually changing subject matter. There is a “deliberate bricolage in the adoption of suitable concepts and theoretical ideas” (McQuail, 2007: xvi). This is also reflected in my theoretical approach, which draws primarily on three different schools of thought: i.e. medium theory, branding theory and sociology. I will be bringing these theories together, critically applying them to the chosen field of study. The primary criterion for choosing these schools of thought has been to answer productively the thesis’ problem statement. A school of thought that Thompson (1995) draws on is medium theory. Thompson however concedes that he does not contribute to the specialist literature in the field of communication, but works primarily within the social theory tradition (Thompson, 1995: 7). To get adequate academic literature in the field of communication, Thompson’s social theory of the media is supplemented by medium theory (Meyrowitz (1994), Finnemann (2005)).


After this initial introduction to the thesis’ theoretical foundation, the following chapter will establish the theoretical framework that forms the basis of the analysis.
4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of three theoretical perspectives. First, I will give an account of the medium theory tradition. Subsequently, I will present present-day branding theory, and finally the sociological perspective on modernity is delineated. Throughout this chapter, I will be bringing these theoretical perspectives together.

4.1 Medium Theory

In its essence, medium theory emphasises the features of a medium that significantly influence the communication and the content of messages (Meyrowitz, 1994). The best known medium theorists are probably Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis. McLuhan’s aphorism ‘the medium is the message’ and Innis’ notion of the ‘bias of communication’ are among the most widely cited and debated concepts in the history of media studies. McLuhan and Innis have been criticised for being technologically deterministic in their view of the media (e.g. Williams, 1974; Lister et al., 2009; Preston, 2009). Even though their approach to media is declared too deterministic, McLuhan and Innis have made it clear that one cannot study the media without taking into account the particular characteristics of each medium. The fact that the medium itself matters will be my point of departure. As Niels Brügger puts it (2002: 41): “if one studies the content of a medium as a closed entity, it is not media study; it is the study of content that ‘happens’ to be within a medium”. This statement emphasises that the medium itself matters when studying media. Media and technology are both defining and enabling, meaning that human beings and technology mutually shape the use of a given technology (van Dijk, 2006: 17). Meyrowitz (1994: 71) states that the most useful way to look at medium theory “is to think of it not as deterministic”. I will argue that the scholars informing this part of the theoretical framework – that is Meyrowitz, Thompson and Finnemann – all are soft determinists in their view of the social and functional role of technology in society. Scholars that follow this line of thought perceive communication technology as an enabling and facilitating factor leading to potential opportunities.
It is important to stress that a soft technological deterministic approach does not reject the idea that cultural factors shape the media. Brügger (2002: 42) and Meyrowitz (1994: 73), among others, emphasises that studying media does not exclude content analysis, reception analysis and so forth. According to the soft deterministic approach, the continuous interaction between technology and culture shape a given society. For the same reason, we cannot limit technology to its social uses. Other factors such as the economy and politics also shape how the technological medium is used in practice (Lister et al., 2009: 340). It is evident that different social groups will ascribe different values and adopt different uses of a given technology. In my approach, I will bear in mind Williams’ notion that culture is a crucial factor shaping technology. I do not however share his purely cultural deterministic standpoint that media are merely shaped by culture, as one can easily miss the fact that *the things themselves matter* (Wardrip-Fruin, 2003: 289). I see technology and culture as interconnected. Technology should not be considered independently of social, political and economic factors, but as a part of a broader context of social life. Technologies cannot function independently of how they are being used in social contexts, as technologies are themselves human products (Flew, 2005: 24; Livingstone, 2002: 19). How different media enable different forms of interaction and how the media structure social settings will be a central aspect addressed in the following sections.

### 4.1.1 Meyrowitz

A medium theorist who has focused on the particular characteristics of each medium is Joshua Meyrowitz. Building on McLuhan and Innis, Meyrowitz sees himself as a second-generation medium theorist who acknowledges that McLuhan and Innis went too far when diagnosing the power of the medium, but who still emphasises that “each medium invites, allows, encourages, fosters some human actions while discouraging others” (Meyrowitz, 1994: 71). According to Meyrowitz, it is not sufficient to focus strictly on the content of media messages; the particular characteristics of each medium are also an important factor (ibid.: 50). As already stated above, Meyrowitz does not neglect the content of media messages. In my approach, I apply Meyrowitz’s notion that rather than functioning merely as channels for conveying information between two or more social environments, the media are themselves contexts that foster certain forms of interaction and social structure (ibid.: 51). Hence, I will focus
on the particular characteristics of each individual medium or general type of media. This is in line with the overall aim of medium theory which is to investigate how a specific medium is “physically, psychologically, and socially different from other media and from face-to-face interaction, regardless of the particular messages that are communicated through it” (Meyrowitz, 1997: 59).

4.1.2 Thompson
In his work on the social theory of the media, John B. Thompson underlines the close interlink between the development of communication media and the rise of modern society and what we often refer to as modernity. Thompson (1995: 11), like Meyrowitz, does not reject the media message, but stresses that mediated communication influences the patterns of social life. If we want to look at the cultural transformations of society, Thompson argues that we need to take into account communication media and their impact, as the development of media technologies are interwoven with the institutional transformations that have shaped modern society. The development and use of communication media creates new forms of social practices as well as new forms of interaction (ibid.: 4). Thompson argues that the expanded accessibility of symbolic forms has a direct impact on the attributes of social life, as information and symbolic content in modern society becomes available for an increasing number of people, within a larger area, at an increased speed (ibid.: 30).

The ease of reproducing symbolic forms is central to how widespread information can become. The invention of printing techniques was crucial as it enabled a production and reproduction of symbolic forms with a speed and to an extent that did not have historical parallels. Before Gutenberg developed the technique of printing, symbolic forms were largely tied to their local context. Publishing however expanded the symbolic form as it could be distributed far beyond the shared space of everyday life. Symbolic forms became increasingly fixed and durable over time. When this happened, the circulation of ideas no longer depended upon face-to-face communication. People were able to “experience events outside their immediate social surroundings” (Slevin, 2000: 1). Changes in the media industry since the end of the 15th century have meant that the number of produced symbolic forms has
increased exponentially. This has occurred due to changes in production, storage and distribution, which are closely linked with the institutional progress that characterises the modern era. As a result, the media has transformed the very nature of symbolic production and exchange (Thompson, 1995: 10).

When people use communication media, they can interact over wide distances and react to things that are taking place far away from the context of face-to-face situations (ibid.: 86). Communication media hence transform the temporal and spatial organisation that existed before the development of media technologies. As Bauman (2000: 117) also underlines, distance no longer limits actions and its effects.

4.1.2.1 Media access and the exercise of power
The following section outlines the relationship between media and symbolic power as laid out by Thompson. Thompson is evidently inspired by Harold Innis’ notion of how control over communication media can reveal how social and political power is wielded (Meyrowitz, 1985: 16). Innis (1951: 4) observed that communication inventions lead to a reorganisation of the knowledge monopoly. Innis uses the diffusion of print and subsequent attempts to maintain a monopoly over what is published as an example of how knowledge gives access to power. As stated by Meyrowitz in *Medium Theory* (1994), power and control become visible in a hierarchy that rests upon non-reciprocal access to information. With the development of different technological innovations, traditional power relationships have changed.

According to Thompson (1995: 19-20), stored information and the form of fixation enabled by a technical medium can be considered as resources for the exertion of different forms of power. As such, power has always been linked to the control of information and communication. As Slevin (2000: 63) phrases it, stored information “can be used by individuals and organizations in the pursuit of certain ends”. Thompson (1995: 52) argues that technical innovations can tear down knowledge monopolies, and takes the expanding commercial printing industry in Europe and the subsequent changes in the balance of symbolic power as an example. As Jan van Dijk (1999, 3) stresses, technology allows for a better overall distribution of knowledge. In
line with this, Charles Leadbeater, when referring to the internet, states that “Barriers to information and knowledge are falling fast” (2009: 2).

When spatial and temporal conditions of communication are altered, the ways in which individuals exercise power also change (Thompson, 1995: 22). The exchange of symbolic forms involves a separation of the place of production and the place where the symbolic form is re-embedded. This process of distancing is what Thompson (ibid.: 21) refers to as space-time distanciation. Space-time distanciation varies according to which technical medium is used. If we take face-to-face communication as an example, the distance between time and space is negligible. Face-to-face communication takes place in what Giddens refers to as “contexts of co-presence” (Slevin, 2000: 69). The conversational parts are present in the same physical environment and they share the same set of references in time and space. When speech is supplemented by various kinds of technical media, the availability of speech becomes extended in time and/or space (Thompson, 1995: 22). As Innis (1951) called to our attention, the new ways in which a technical medium enables individuals to exercise power is therefore influenced by the new temporal and spatial patterns, as people can act and interact at a distance.

4.1.2.2 The flow of interaction
In traditional mass media, recipients have usually had only limited opportunities to intervene or contribute to the production of messages. Compared to face-to-face interaction, the producer of messages cannot get constant feedback from the receivers, as mass communication generally involves a one-way flow of information. To compensate for this lack of feedback, producers of media content have developed instruments such as market analyses to identify audiences and monitor how many they are and how they react to content (Thompson, 1995: 29). Because of the nature of mass communication, there is an imbalanced relationship between the sender and the receiver in the communicative process.21 Recipients simply do not have a pronounced possibility to intervene in the production of mediated messages. As a

21 Thompson (1995) distinguishes between three types of interaction, i.e. face-to-face interaction, mediated interaction and mediated quasi-interaction. Hjarvard (2008: 40-41) highlights that it can be misleading to use the term “quasi-” as this indicates that a TV-programme or a newspaper article are not as real as the letter or face-to-face interaction. From a sociological perspective, this is an inadequate term as a telephone conversation cannot be more real than a radio programme.
result, the communicative process may be characterised as asymmetrical, if not entirely monological. Or as Thompson (ibid.: 29) puts it: “the flow of messages is a structured flow in which the capacity of recipients to intervene in or contribute to the process of production is strictly circumscribed”.

Thompson (1995: 86) nevertheless acknowledges that forms of interaction can change with new communication technology. He emphasises that input from the receiver may be increased in time. Since Thompson wrote *The Media and Modernity* (1995), there has been a rapid change in the way we communicate - especially with the diffusion of the internet and the mobile phone. To extend his ideas to the internet and the concept of interactivity, I will now turn to Finnemann’s (2005) work on the internet in a historical perspective, in order to tease out the impact and consequences of the internet and the new means of communication on the total media matrix.

**4.1.3 Finnemann and the fifth media matrix**
The last section on medium theory will delve into a relatively new medium, the internet. Niels Ole Finnemann’s characterisation of the internet in a media historic perspective is fruitful, both to inform my primary research area which is found within this medium, and because of the strengthened position of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in today’s society. The speed of communication and the forms of interactivity on the internet are pronounced. Furthermore, the conventional producer/receiver dichotomy is being blurred (Slevin, 2000: 74). Finnemann (2005: 53) perceives storage capacity combined with the speed of communication as the distinctive characteristics of the internet.

According to Steve Lohr (2010), evolution has always been the primary rule of media ecology. Lohr (ibid.) notices that: “New media predators rise up, but other media species typically adapt rather than perish”. Therefore, new media cannot function independently, but will always repurpose the content of existing media and refashion other media technologies (Flew, 2005: 37). This also stresses the importance of being cautious about claims for the revolutionary potential of media innovations (ibid.). The evolutionary process that characterises media ecology therefore also stresses the importance of media history. The history of the media enables us to understand
different types of societies, as every society is defined by the existence of an organised communicative community (Finnemann, 2005: 18). Furthermore, a given society’s media matrix “always sets up some terms and conditions for the society as the media matrix allows and favours some forms of communication and complicates or excludes others” [my translation] (ibid.). In his research, Finnemann applies the medium theory approach and follows the line of Meyrowitz (1985: 69), when stating that: “new media have an effect by being different from older media and by changing those aspects of society that depended on earlier means of communicating”. Finnemann (2005: 60) also argues that we can only understand the role of each medium if we look at the entire media picture.

Finnemann (ibid.: 51) identifies five main types of information societies, of which we are entering the fifth.22 All societies are centred on the communication of information and knowledge, as a society cannot exist without the production and exchange of information. Hence, the information society is not a new phenomenon even though in the last two decades it has been emphasised that we have entered the information or knowledge society.23 One way of distinguishing one information society from another is by looking at the matrix of available media. By doing so, the following five main types of information societies may be identified (ibid.: 35-38):

- Oral society
- Societies based on speech + writing
- Societies based on speech + writing + print
- Societies based on speech + writing + print + media based on energy
- Societies based on speech + writing + print + media based on energy + digital media

Each type of society is characterised by its own media matrix. The internet marks the transition to the fifth media matrix, where society is defined by a globally distributed

22 McLuhan divides history into three periods: oral, writing/printing, and electronic (Meyrowitz, 1985: 17).
23 Nonetheless, the amount of information that is being communicated has vastly increased. Some scholars underline that we live in society where knowledge has become central to economic activity, knowledge is money, and that is why terms such as information economy (Deuze, 2007, 16) and knowledge economy (Preston, 2009: 171; Flew, 2005: 140) are so widely used.
and coherent communication infrastructure (ibid.: 38). As Jensen (1999: 10) argues, the internet makes up a matrix that aggregates all former media into one. The model enables us to see the history of the media in the light of the new media history, in which the integration of the internet and other digital media is the focal point (Finnemann, 2005: 33). As the internet and other digital media have become an integrated part especially of Western capitalist democracies, these media have merged with matured media to form our society’s communication infrastructure. The new media contribute to a reshaping of the existing media matrix, resulting in a new communication infrastructure (ibid.: 12). As the use of the individual medium depends on and is adjusted to the available range of media at any given moment, the point of departure must be the media matrix that is available for a society at a particular moment in time (ibid.: 34).

4.1.3.1 The new media layer
When new media emerge, they typically co-exist with older media. New media draw on the traits of older media and combine new components with existing practice. McLuhan (1964: 58) was the first to argue that each medium is in a constant interplay with others. This means that older media also change character when new media arrive. As Lister et al. (2009: 48) have argued, “media are not born in a vacuum”, implying that media history matters as new media draw on and negotiate with older media. In his prophetic writing, McLuhan perceives: “media as extensions of our senses institute new ratios, not only among our private senses, but among themselves, when they interact among themselves” (1964: 58). In their work on new media, Bolter & Grusin (2000) pursue McLuhan’s thoughts on how new media affect and are affected by older media. Their central argument is that new media are remediated; that is existing media are represented in the new medium (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 85).

New media are dependent upon older media and there is a constant dialectic between the new and the old (Lister et al., 2009: 62), or as Flew (2005: 224) frames it, there are “historical continuities between the development of ‘new’ and ‘old’ media”. Finnemann (2005: 16) supports this view in arguing that new traits do not come into being as pure innovations, but as an interaction between the new and the already

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24 McLuhan provides a variety of examples of how new media have changed older media, ranging from the impact of television on radio and the impact of cinema on novels such as James Joyce’s cinematically inspired *Ulysses*. 

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existing. This leads us to an examination of what is unique about the fifth media matrix.

As Thompson (1995: 18) has observed, all processes, which involve the exchange of symbolic forms engage a technical medium. Be it face-to-face communication with the body as medium or mediated communication through television or the internet. As technical media enable the fixation of symbolic forms, symbolic forms can be stored with varying levels of durability. The degree of fixation depends upon the specific medium and its ability to preserve information for later usage (ibid.: 19). The internet has vastly increased the capacity of information storage (Slevin, 2000: 63). When arguing for the unique characteristics of the internet, Finnemann (2005) draws on fixation as one factor. Finnemann (2005: 53) highlights the storage capacity of printing media combined with the speed of communication characterising electronic media as the unique and pivotal characteristics of the internet. Besides its digital nature and unlimited storage capacity, the internet enables more differentiation between potential senders of media messages (ibid.: 98). Furthermore, the medium is originally interactive since in principle all nodes in the network are able to interact. The internet therefore not only extends people’s capacity to experience events in other time-space settings, but also provides new ways of participating in the creation of events (Slevin, 2000: 9).

In sum, we can conclude that: 1) the internet has an unlimited storage capacity, 2) content can be distributed to all potential users of the web, 3) participation is an integral part of the internet’s infrastructure due to the ease of interactivity, and 4) the internet is a fast communicative tool due to space-time distanciation (Thompson, 1995). As we have seen, technological development has disruptive effects on established ways of interacting. This leads to the second part of the theory chapter, which will outline branding theory. The chapter will outline how brands are formed in an interaction between customers and companies.

4.2 Branding

When examining branding in a company context, one central, underlying premise is that companies’ raison d’être is to earn money. It follows that most actions made by
companies are driven by economic incentives. Expanding the scope of companies’ customer base and strengthening the relationship with existing customers are therefore a natural part of companies’ search for economic growth – be it in business-to-consumer or business-to-business markets.

Strong brands have become a pivotal tool in the competition for customers and increased market share. In what follows, I will give a comprehensive introduction to branding theory, not only taking into account brands as customers’ knowledge of different products and services, but also the company’s aim to build brands by creating deeper, more consistent and intense engagements with their consumers. In mapping out branding theory, the aim is to outline the intangibles inherent in the nature of the brand (Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2009: 5). The point of departure is corporate branding, which traditionally addresses all of the company’s stakeholders. Even though other stakeholders in conjunction with consumers create brand value, I will - in line with the thesis’ problem statement and aim of inquiry - focus on how companies relate to consumers. In addition to the corporate branding approach, I will follow the relational approach outlined by Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre (ibid.: 175). The relational approach perceives branding as an ongoing process where brand value is co-created between brand and consumer. The relationship between brand and consumer within the relational approach is illustrated in Figure 2.

![Figure 2](Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2009: 154)

Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre (ibid.: 155) describe this as a dyadic brand-consumer relationship where meaning is created in the interaction between sender and receiver. Relationships are in a state of constant flux, and thus management of the brand also becomes an unstable process that changes over time (ibid.: 164).
4.2.1 Understanding branding
A strong brand has certain characteristics that people relate to and which differ from attributes that make up other brands. Brands build a set of values and opinions that enable people to distinguish one brand from others within a category (Schultz, 2008). A key point here is that it is not enough to be, for example, a large financial institution. It is important to be something that is different from competitors in terms of values and ideas, as companies can use this differentiation to attract new customers.

Strong brands foster certain feelings, which then trigger a sense of belonging to a certain community of people with a distinctive taste. Brands enable people to seek similar “others” and differentiate themselves from people with dissimilar interests or values (Hatch & Shultz, 2008: 21). Studies have shown that communities have a strong feeling of “we-ness” that differs from the “others” (ibid.: 156). This inclusion and exclusion creates the dual benefits of differentiation and belonging. From a company perspective, a strong brand creates strong bonds between the brand and its stakeholders. When utilised fully, consumers and other stakeholders not only insinuate but also feel their identities are intertwined with the brand (ibid.: 31). Thus, the brand becomes embedded in the consumer’s identity and in the process of meaning creation, emphasising “the roles meaning and interpretation play in giving brands economic value” (ibid.: 36). Brands are therefore also a way for people to create their identities as brands expresses dimensions of who we are as individuals (Schultz, 2008). This also leads to another central point in branding theory: that strong brands have moved beyond product attributes in order to say that “it is not the products as much as the brands that matter” (Arvidsson, 2006a: 5). We do not simply buy a product or a service for what it is. We do not buy a car because we can then be transported from A to B more quickly than by walking. We buy products and services for what they stand for (Hatch & Shultz, 2008: 28). Brands thus give people “symbols to represent their own ideas, feelings, or experiences while associating them with the company the brand represents” (ibid.: 29). Here it is valuable to delve further into how corporate branding differs from product branding. The aim of traditional product branding is to supply added value to the product so products can be differentiated from products delivered by competitors. Corporate branding on the other hand is about “selling” the corporation behind the product i.e. corporate values, standards,
4.2.2 Brand Value
As we have seen, consumers not only pay for the commodity when they buy a branded item, but also for the communicative potential of the item (Arvidsson, 2006a: 131). As a former Communications Advisor at Heineken, Marjolijn Vencken (2010), has said: it costs €0.30 to produce a litre of Heineken. Consumers buy the product for €2 or more – the balance is brand value. Arvidsson (2006a: 131) argues that the communicability and compatibility of the brand “makes up the source of its use-value, both for consumers and for corporations”. The physical property that consumers buy has a function of a medium, which gives access to the brand (ibid.). There are usually a variety of products linked to one brand. When consumer goods are purchased, people get access to the brand as a communicative tool that can produce a certain kind of meaning. Consequently, the source of the brand’s value, and what makes up brand equity, is not so much the physical qualities of products or services as the relationship between the product/service and the consumer. Products are merely artefacts that people have experiences with and use. The real value becomes realisable when people link certain feelings to a product and when the brand becomes a “resources for the construction of the self” (ibid: 82). In relation to this thesis’s empirical resources, these observations may be related to one of the main objectives of brand management: to merge “the becoming of subjects and the becoming of value” (ibid.: 93).

According to Arvidsson (2006b), the brand penetrates peoples’ lives and becomes a medium like language that enables people to build social relationships and identities. Furthermore, he argues that the key to successful business lies in providing people with a platform where they can make communities by interacting with each other or by making people feel as if they are a part of a bigger brand community. Communities have existed around certain products and corporations for a long time, but what has changed is the interconnectedness between people enabled by the internet (Schultz, 2008). People that produce and exchange information carry a huge potential for companies in different stages of product and service development as
people can become active in the innovation process as consumers sharing their ideas created in communities on the internet. Besides involving consumers in innovation processes, an “outreach to stakeholders also provides information about how the company looks to others” (Hatch & Schultz, 2008: 49). In other words, companies gain information about themselves when listening to consumers. In general the approach leads to a closer relationship between companies and consumers and between consumers and brands.

4.2.3 Brands as open-ended

There has been a paradigm shift within brand management. The Kotlerian approach to marketing where audiences are seen as passive has been replaced by an interactive audience approach, where users (formerly known as audiences) participate in the elaboration of the brand (Arvidsson, 2006a: 101).

In line with Lury (2004: 132), and as I will argue for later in this chapter, I see the brand as an object or medium of interaction between producers and consumers: an object not fixed in time, but in a continual process of differentiation. Branding is thus not static, but a dynamic and relative phenomenon that is altered continually. As Majken Schultz (2008) has pointed out, a company no longer “owns” its own brand as it is co-developed by the company’s stakeholders. For the same reason, marketers must renounce total control of the brand and incorporate meaning created by consumers in the management of the brand (Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2009: 175). Therefore a brand is not and never can be completed (Lury, 2006: 163). In line with the mindset that the hermeneutic tradition prescribes, brand management no longer sees consumers as passive beings that do not interpret the messages sent to them. Hence, brand management now focuses on involving active consumers in various ways as a part of the branding strategy. This is not to say that consumers now “own” the brand, but that brands are mutually dependent on companies, consumers and other stakeholders. Consumers have become more autonomous when dealing with brands: especially on the internet where communities can take a brand in a direction not intended by the company (Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2009: 21).

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25 The same can be said about media studies, where the traditional academic approach has been the theory of linear communication from sender to receiver and a perception of audiences as passive recipients. This has changed and audiences are now seen as active interpreters of received messages.
This increased consumer influence can also be seen in Hatch & Schultz’s (2008) approach to corporate branding. According to Hatch & Schultz (2008), it has become pivotal for corporations to understand how their identity is perceived in the eyes of stakeholders. As shown in Figure 3, organisational identity is a dynamic process involving both internal as well as external images of the corporation.

Hatch & Schultz (ibid.: 57) argue that if companies wish to keep their brand alive, they must go to where the brand lives: “deep within your stakeholders’ relationship with the company.” A corporation is thus determined, among other things, by how consumers see the company. Hatch & Schultz (ibid.: 64) describe this as the first step in successful corporate branding – that businesses do not turn a deaf ear to what consumers have to say, but monitor and engage in conversations with satisfied as well as dissatisfied consumers “whether or not you like what you hear”. Otherwise, there may well be a misalignment between how a corporation sees itself and how consumers and other stakeholders see the corporation. The central position of customers in delineating organisational identity stresses the enhanced importance of consumers in defining a company’s brand.

In line with the relational approach to branding, Lury (2006: 46-47) argues that the brand is more or less open-ended and is in an ongoing dynamic relationship between “production” and “consumption”. At its core, the brand is “out there” and not merely controlled by the company. According to Lury (ibid.: 50), the brand’s interface
informs how consumers relate to producers and *vice versa* based on two-way exchange. Drawing on Manovich’s theory of new media, Lury argues that brands as well as new media objects “give rise to many different versions” (Manovich, 2001: 36); the brand has an inherent variability that is not “fixed once and for all” (ibid.). To conclude, the brand is an interface of communication between producer and consumer (Lury, 2006: 48). This tendency is enhanced by the omnipresent internet, where people’s opinions are not dependent upon memory alone as the internet’s storage capacity together with the speed of communication enables people to influence what is said about a company, how it is said and to whom the messages are sent. From a corporate perspective, this has meant that businesses have gone from a we-do-not-talk-about-it attitude to a we-have-to-talk-about-it approach. The internet has pulled companies towards greater transparency as it has made it much harder for companies to ignore what people say online. In relation to branding, this means that meaning and opinions are in a continuous process of being defined.

4.2.4 Co-creation

In the following part, I will outline the co-creation tendency that the internet has enhanced and largely enabled. One strategy that many businesses leverage is co-creation, crowdsourcing or user-led innovation. Basically this means that companies are incorporating the productive activities of consumers into their business strategies. Jeff Howe was the first to introduce the term “crowdsourcing”. In Wired Magazine (2006) and subsequently in his book “Crowdsourcing” (2008), Howe shows how companies can take advantage of the internet and the productive potential of users online. In essence, Howe (2006) claims that we have gone from outsourcing to crowdsourcing - from leveraging cheap labour from China and India to leveraging the much cheaper labour of enthusiasts, willing to give companies new information and even intellectual property such as articles and video collages. Charles Leadbeater (2009) argues that the web becomes more egalitarian when people create *en masse*. Taking Wikipedia, Facebook and YouTube as examples, Leadbeater (2009: 19) argues for the internet’s co-creation potential.

The shift from people as customers to also becoming collaborators of the products and services that they buy should not be seen merely as a democratisation of innovations
as some have argued (von Hippel, 2005: 123), but also as an exploitation of the voluntary work performed by individual customers. As the CEO at Dell Inc., Michael Dell, has put it: “Our best customers aren’t necessarily the ones that… buy the most from us, or the ones that require little help or service… our best customers are those we learn the most from” (quoted in Lury, 2006: 43). This is a process of convergence, which blurs the line between production and consumption. Henry Jenkins (2004: 37), when talking about media culture, points out that in an increased participatory culture convergence reinforces the relationship between producers and consumers. Furthermore, Jenkins emphasises that convergence is both a corporate-driven top-down process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process.

The converging culture that Jenkins (2004) describes can be related to crowdsourcing. The tendency is present on the internet where for example the real-time web provides a platform where people not only go from being “passive” audiences to becoming active users in a media production context, but also to being active co-creators of business products. Stated another way, the real-time web fosters companies’ ability to incorporate customers in the process of innovation. By doing so, businesses can leverage a part of the power of the real-time web to their own advantage.

The co-creation that customers carry out generates additional revenue to companies at little or no extra cost. This user driven productivity on the internet really came to the fore after the dot.com bubble in 2001. The widely-used term “web 2.0” coined by Tim O’Reilly focuses on the internet as a platform more than as a distributer of information. The main point in this business model is that users are stimulated to produce content and other innovations whereupon corporations can make money (Arvidsson, 2006c). The value of this model materialises when companies are able to control and guide users’ voluntary and spontaneous productivity (ibid.). The art of engaging users in the co-creation of corporate value is realised when people feel they gain something from being active. Arvidsson (ibid.) argues that people are “paid” with a feeling of identity and belonging to a brand community. Hence, when companies are involved with users on the web, it is important that people feel they get added value for directing their attention to a certain brand, and that companies are in continuing contact with their users/customers.
The co-creation of products is also apparent in computer programmes whose functions have a dual structure: “they are simultaneously things-to-be-used and things-in-a-process-of-transformation (Lury, 2004: 130). Google, as an example, often uses the term “beta” when introducing new products. This not only gives firms goodwill, as they explicitly say that the product is not finished (even though it is launched and in use), but can also give companies valuable information about a product or service, as companies seek feedback from people to improve their product and thereby also the user’s experience. Hence, this is in line with Lury’s (ibid.: 131) definition of the brand as an object “that calls upon us to relate to it; to interact with it”. Here companies are saying, “we do not have all the solutions, do you have a good idea?“ That is to say, brands are more about “You may” than “You must” (Lury, 2004: 131, Arvidsson, 2006a: 93).

Brand communities play a vital part in the process of mapping out the co-creation that occurs around many brands. Communities centred around brands create value both in terms of their willingness to give businesses valuable information about products and companies and for their enthusiasm when sharing and spreading information about the brand to other like-minded as well as potential customers. In general, communities protect what they consider their sacred heritage - that is a common understanding of what the brand stands for. (Hatch & Schultz, 2008: 157). They will often defend the brand against criticism and will protest if the company goes in a different direction from what is in the interest of the community. This is why co-creation is managed strategically as well as why community managers listen and respond through conversations with communities: companies have become more transparent and open-minded from a consumer perspective.

To sum up, there is an intensified interaction and thereby also interdependency between the company and the customer. One outcome of this tendency is that corporations use the information and creative work carried out by customers as a strategic resource in their brand-building activities. This makes good sense for companies, as they can use the increased participatory nature of the real-time web to foster consumer loyalty and a “work force” that works for “free”, which long-term can improve their financial performance.
4.3 Bauman

I will now turn to the final part of the theory chapter, which comes from sociological theory. I lean primarily on the social theory of Zygmunt Bauman as a means to ground my analysis of the opportunities and challenges that companies face when trying to give a positive image of their business on the real-time web. I will draw on Bauman’s work *Liquid Modernity* (2000) as a framework for looking at how the changes that the real-time web brings about can be understood in a larger societal context. Bauman’s diagnosis of modern society will be the key reference to understand the effects of people sharing opinions, reactions and attitudes about businesses, products or services on the internet. Bauman’s theory can also be used to link the changing nature of brand management to the technological developments that affect social life.

4.3.1 The fluid ideal

My point of departure in understanding how the real-time web affects the relationship between company and customer is Bauman’s notion of the *liquidity of modern societies*. While Bauman uses the term *fluid modernity* to characterise contemporary society, Anthony Giddens (1990) and others have used the term *late modernity*. Essentially different labels are used to name the same processes that characterise the ongoing modernisation of society, albeit different aspects of society are being studied. For the sake of clarity and because of its large prevalence, I will use the term “late modernity” when referring to the current state of society.

Bauman (2000: 58) argues that we have moved from heavy capitalism to light capitalism. In the heavy capitalism era, people were likely to work at the same workplace throughout the course of their professional lives. Comparing the *Fordist* model - an archetype of heavy capitalism - to working at Microsoft, Bauman exemplifies how people in the light capitalism era are likely to search for new challenges after a relatively short period at the firm. According to Bauman (ibid.: 126), the transformation from heavy to light capitalism is also a turn from solid to fluid modernity. Today’s abundance of commodities and services is one obvious characteristic of light capitalism. Bauman (ibid.: 125) argues that: “The ‘short term’ has replaced the ‘long term’”, making “instantaneity its ultimate ideal”. Jørgensen
(2002: 72) argues that late modernity is dominated by a liberal culture where all ties that restrict free expression are released. Predictability is hence devalued as it limits individual liberty. Change as a permanent condition hence becomes important.

Bauman (2000: 62) notices that it is important that nothing becomes absolute or conclusive if possibilities are to remain endless. The opportunities that are most desirable are the ones that have a ‘use-by’ date attached, as people then can be certain that they are part of changing circumstances. The state of incompleteness that enables individuals to become “anybody” is however a two-edged sword. Even though becoming signals: “nothing is over yet and everything lies ahead” (ibid.), to become somebody, suggests that you have arrived at your final destination, hence the possibilities have narrowed and the freedom of becoming has been restricted.

According to Baudrillard (Jørgensen, 2002: 74), we buy signs and narratives when we buy and consume objects, and in this process we define ourselves. It follows that goods and objects are also used as communication. In doing so, people seek to construct and maintain a specific identity and in addition get the opportunity to lean on the tales of the good life (ibid.: 75). The consumption of goods can therefore be said to enable the fulfilment of the subject. I will argue that it is too naïve to conclude that we are merely what we consume, but that the subject is realised through a wide variety of settings, one of which is the consumption of commodities. However, there is still a constant demand for new products and services that can be consumed. The ideal is a fluid condition where everything can be renegotiated. As Bauman (2000: 72) states, when discussing the world of consumers: “possibilities are infinite, and the volume of seductive goals on offer can never be exhausted”.

4.3.2 The logic of the market
Bauman (2000: 76-77) argues that consumerism is not normatively regulated. The subject becomes the starting-point and has little or no references to other people that may guide and sketch the norms at any given moment. Therefore, being ‘ever ready’ to follow new demands becomes highly significant (ibid.: 77). I would argue that Bauman goes too far when stating that life which is organised around consumption is completely detached from norms. There has been much talk about the normless
society and the loss of moral habitus within society (DR2, 2010). However, I will argue that there are still normative regulations even though the value systems have become more diversified and fragmented. It is no longer determined a priori what the individual can and must accomplish in his/her lifetime. This is also in line with Jørgensen’s (2002: 128) view that we have become isolated as individuals and that people’s identity is transformed from something given to something relative.

Bauman’s diagnose of society reflects the liberal turn that has occurred, especially, since the 1980s. Jørgensen (ibid.: 73) has observed that the free market has become the new frame of reference and that everything that contributes to the expression of the market is seen as desirable. This is not to say that I take a normative standpoint, but rather I aim to draw out some of the consequences of the free market and the growing popularity of Laissez-faire economics on individuals’ consumer habits.

There are ever-shifting production and consumption trends that amplify the fluid and unstable character of everyday life and the unpredictability of consumers’ wants and needs. As Deuze (2007: 9) argues, modern life is “shaped by the hasty demands of the here and now”.

The description above is directly related to the logic of the market. The market is very unstable, unreliable, and impulsive; it is also defined by the absence of boundaries and stable frontiers (Jørgensen, 2002: 73). Furthermore, the dominant tendency of the market is that it is constantly in progress. According to Sennett (ibid.: 102), the inherent logic of capitalism is the breakdown of all frontiers and the devaluation of any stabilising elements. Openness, flexibility, and constant change are the ideals of capitalistic growth (ibid.). These ideals are reflected in people’s aim of constantly seeking new ends. These patterns have partly emerged because individuals have come to rely less on historically strong institutions such as family, state and church. The dismantling of tradition has meant that cultural conventions and institutions no longer determine identity formation. Individuals as well as markets have become less conventional. This is for example seen on the real-time web and the unpredictability of user-generated content (Arvidsson, 2007: 27).
4.3.3 The unpredictability of consumers
According to Bauman, people in a consumerist culture will never become completely unique, as it would stop the act of consumption (Deuze, 2007: 29). This contradicts Jørgensen’s view (2002: 77) that people strive to stand out from the mass through their consumption and prefer products and services that are promoted as authentic. In Bourdieu’s terms (ibid.: 165), we differentiate ourselves from others through lifestyle and taste. Individuals will however always be part of a larger segment, which represents a more or less similar taste and lifestyle. Without speaking for or against consumers’ degree of individual freedom, Bauman (2000: 83-84) perceives the universal dependency on shopping as the foundation of consumers’ identity construction, or phrased differently: “unstable things are the raw building material of identities” (ibid.: 85). As Hjarvard (2008: 273) has observed, the media have gained a pronounced presence in guiding individuals. Users seek and explore the media partly to navigate in late modernity, where the individual has been set free. Hjarvard (ibid.) therefore argues that the media has become an important variable in forming individuals’ habitus.

According to Bauman (2000: 115), the freedom of choosing has become a value in its own right more than what is chosen. The short-term focus that characterises contemporary society and the consequences that it brings about will be elaborated on in the following part.

4.3.4 The short-term ideal
In this section, I will look at the real-time web through the lens of fluid modernity. In Bauman’s (2000: 81) view, people who run after something also run from something. Individuals moreover engage in the act of consuming to escape insecurity (ibid.). There are likely to be more reasons for shopping than presented by Bauman (2000). If, however, we assume that people consume partly to feel secure in a world of constant uncertainty, it is evident that the security that shopping brings is not constant, as the products and services are continually altered and replaced by new entrants. This is in line with Jørgensen (2002: 83) who claims that the price of freedom is new insecurity. The insecurity that individualisation fosters can be a part of the explanation why brand communities have become popular: in these communities
people can achieve a kind of collective identity, one in which shared interest is pivotal.

Deuze (2007: 40) questions if it is not counterintuitive to argue that we have become individualised and more autonomous, while at the same time proclaiming that we also engage in an emerging participative culture. His answer is that society has become more segregated and fragmented, partly due to changes in the media landscape. Besides a higher degree of isolation, we have however also become more connected. This is in line with Mulgan’s utterance (in van Dijk, 2006: 1): “The world may never have been freer, but it has also never been so interdependent and interconnected”.

But how can these diverging tendencies, fragmentation and interdependency be seen on the real-time web? As Deuze (2007: 27) notices, we spend an increased amount of time producing information on for example the internet, meaning we thereby increasingly engage in different acts of consumption. As elucidated in part 4.2.4, companies utilise this by incorporating customers into the innovation process through crowdsourcing, co-creation or user-led innovation (Howe, 2008). Monitoring brand community discussions together with occasionally pushing information to consumers can therefore be 1) a way for companies to better comprehend the unpredictability of the wants and needs of consumers, and 2) a way of supplying consumers with products and/or services that satisfy the demand for permanent change. In other words: “the creativity of ordinary users is systematically put to work” (Arvidsson, 2007: 26). Companies absorb people’s productivity on the internet to their own advantage by aggregating autonomous user productivity. This is consistent with Deuze’s (2007: 16) notion that labour is organised around reflexive production principles “where constant monitoring of consumer habits and patterns serves to flexibly adjust existing production processes”. Meyrowitz (1985) argues that media technologies have come to blur spheres that once were separated. Bauman does not directly refer to Meyrowitz, but nonetheless argues that the increased fluidity of everyday life blurs formerly distinctive parts of society, i.e. what is seen as private/public and local/global (Deuze, 2007: 42). To adjust to the liquefaction and changing characteristics of media, companies strive to become more transparent and to facilitate conversations that take place on the internet. Uncertainty is however not only a permanent condition for companies but also for individuals in their search for
identity-building products and services that make up a “comforting feeling of belonging” (Bauman, 2000: 99). This partly explains why most companies have established business-to-consumer networks on the internet. As Deuze (2007: 19) has remarked, this also implies that: “the interaction between company and consumer – and thus their interdependency – has intensified”. One outcome is that businesses directly involve consumers in the value chain.

To sum up, the liquefaction of life means that companies and individuals have to be more flexible to satisfy the demand for capital and identities respectively, as the attention and what is seen as popular is constantly changing. The readjustment is pronounced as the changing patterns of demands are characterised by constant uncertainty. The social sphere on the internet is both a challenge as well as an opportunity for companies as they are faced with the potential to leverage consumers’ interests in exploring what is untried, to stimulate continuous productivity led by consumers and to intensify consumers’ brand relationships.
5 Analysis
The purpose of collecting data has been to shed light on companies’ challenges and opportunities when launching their brand on the real-time web. First, an elucidation of the theoretical framework and a clarification of the method were given. In this chapter, I seek to answer the thesis’ hypothesis, which is that the real-time web amplifies a greater consumer influence on corporate brands. By delving into the empirical material, I will argue that the real-time web alters companies’ relationship to consumers, as well as their brands. Rooted in the already presented theory, I will argue that the nature of the internet combined with the logic of branding can be a way for companies to intensify the relationship between the brand and the consumer. While the observed findings are laid out in this chapter, the implications of these findings are presented in the conclusion.

The analysis consists of three case studies – Berlingske, SAS and Normann Copenhagen – which are presented in three separate parts. Each section begins with an elaboration of why the companies chose to set up Facebook and Twitter accounts. In the analysis, I will pin down two interviews with professionals working at media monitoring bureaus and apply their experiences where it is considered appropriate. Then, in the subsequent section, I will engage in a discussion where I relate my findings to the research question and compare the three case studies to uncover patterns and difference. Finally, in the last chapter, I will present an overall conclusion.

5.1 Berlingske
Intellectual property is important to bear in mind when examining media companies. Even if media content is intangible and difficult to measure in terms of value, I define Berlingske’s production of news, background and leading articles, blogs and so forth as a form of commodity. As a provider of information, newspapers have a dual function. Journalists and editors produce news reports, features, etc. in order to attract readers. Access to readers is then sold to advertisers (Doyle, 2002:120). It has proved difficult for media companies to date to earn money on media content that is

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26 See Appendix p. 72 for a short introduction of the three companies.
published online. Berlingske has not succeeded in establishing payment services on berlingske.dk and most content is therefore provided free of charge. The company’s Facebook and Twitter accounts link to berlingske.dk, and these services are also offered for free. At present, the company generates revenue from its online business by selling information about who reads and interacts on berlingske.dk to companies that use berlingske.dk as an advertising platform.

5.1.1 The company’s incentive
When Berlingske’s top management chose to employ a community manager it was part of a strategy of better integrating digital media in the company. Like other traditional print media, the company has changed significantly since the latter half of the 1990s. Berlingske wanted to strengthen the company’s presence in digital media and strengthen its community profile, as a growing number of users of the Berlingske brand became present on Twitter and Facebook in particular. Berlingske established a Facebook account in 2008. Before Berlingske’s community manager, Astrid Haug, was employed in January 2010, the company merely had an RSS feed to upload content onto Facebook. It was not until Haug began her work that users also began commenting on and discussing topics on Berlingske’s Facebook profile. According to Astrid Haug, one other reason for employing a community manager at Berlingske was to facilitate a new relationship between journalists and users/readers. When asked about her job, Astrid Haug says that:

“The journalistic task is my primary one; to support a process from a slightly inactive or passive dialogue with our readers to a more active one.” (Appendix: 2)

Furthermore she says:

“I think the distance that often exists between journalists and the readers or users is decreased if we use it [the real-time web]” (Appendix: 13)

As shown here, Berlingske seeks to engage people in conversations that affect existing patterns and practices, for example by an increased user orientation in journalistic production. Haug also sees service-mindedness as part of her job function,
i.e. helping and resolving users’ questions and responding to criticism (Appendix: 6). One reason why Berlingske listens to what its customers say is simply to positively influence customers’ experience of the Berlingske brand. The company’s activities on Facebook and Twitter are also considered important in terms of their brand effect:

“It’s also a way to digitalise Berlingske’s brand, as a company that embraces the new platforms, applies and integrates them” (Appendix: 16).

Berlingske has been perceived as the industry’s “old aunt”: as a conservative and bourgeois company. Being active on Facebook and Twitter is hence a way of altering this image by showing that the company adopts new technology and follows cultural trends (Appendix: 16). To realise the aim of giving the company a younger brand, the community manager has for example sought out stories that have a viral potential.

“… what stories have a viral potential, which news stories do people prefer?
(Appendix: 1)

The amount of time that Berlingske estimates can pass before customers get an answer or a comment has decreased with Facebook and Twitter. Jarvis (2009: 107) argues that companies have lost control of timing, as “you no longer decide when to […] answer critics. You can’t subject your customers to waiting on hold”. In line with medium theory, the following quotes show that a medium is not transparent, as it influences the communicative act. The increased speed of communication, which the real-time web fosters, affects the business processes of a company like Berlingske. According to Astrid Haug:

“It’s better if there’s a lower rank employee that answers “fine, we’re on it and will investigate the matter” instead of waiting three hours without responding, because a manager has to finish a meeting and make a decision. That’s unacceptable”
(Appendix: 12).

Haug further states:
“We pay a lot of attention to answering, because the faster you enter the sphere and answer and the more surplus you have, the more likely it is that you’ll succeed in silencing criticism, or at least make the person criticising you take on a more friendly attitude” (Appendix: 6).

The professionalisation of the journalistic field and the development of journalistic education have provided journalists with a considerable amount of autonomy (Hjarvard, 2008: 73). In recent years, journalists have come to rely more on the rationality of the media, meaning that today’s journalists must strengthen their focus on cross-medial production on digital platforms, a higher user-oriented journalistic output and so forth. On the whole, journalists have become disentangled from political parties and control, but in return have come to rely more on media logic (ibid.). Berlingske’s decision to employ a community manager should be seen in this light, and it has moreover been articulated in one of the community manager’s tasks. Astrid Haug has for example given in-house presentations on how to integrate the real-time web into the journalistic practice. Haug is also present at editorial meetings, giving advice and incorporating the real-time web into the overall strategy behind the company’s media output – and potentially with a strengthened input from users.

Astrid Haug observes that:

“Journalists now have access to more input and angles and thereby also more sources than they would otherwise have. And that contributes to a change in journalistic practice” (Appendix: 14).

Journalistic professionalism and an increased market logic have triggered the fall of the party press. If we look at Berlingske’s presence on Facebook, it is evident that the company’s ‘publications’ on the site are partly determined by what readers find interesting. The fact that the community manager focuses on content that has a viral potential is an expression of this. A new pressure has replaced the pluralistic freedom of the late 20th century. For Berlingske, this means that everything that is published must support the Berlingske brand.

Even though the company’s social media output is partly shaped by what users find interesting, Berlingske’s core values – serious and trustworthy journalism – are also
important to articulate on these platforms, as they are the backbone of the Berlingske brand. The idea of viral media content is nevertheless, to some extent, in conflict with critical and reflective journalism. As Astrid Haug puts it:

“We are incredibly conscious of focusing on serious journalism, but we do it in a 2010-ish way” (Appendix: 16).

This quote shows that Berlingske cannot fully adopt all news stories and blogs that carry a viral potential, as the overall media output must fit with the company’s core values. The Berlingske brand may, however, draw inspiration from users on the real-time web, and the social sphere enables the company to get insight into cultural trends and current issues.27 Even though Berlingske’s core values are fixed, it is still evident that the brand has become more open-ended (see Ch. 4.2.2). This partly confirms my hypothesis of greater consumer influence. Consumers might alter the corporate brand, but at Berlingske, strong journalistic practice also limits how much the values that make up the Berlingske brand can be modified. As I argue in the subsequent section, the community manager actively seeks to shape the relationship between Berlingske’s online community and the brand by inviting users to co-create the brand together with the company.

5.1.2 The consumers’ impact

The participation culture is far more visible on the internet compared to when Berlingske was merely a print newspaper. Customers on the real-time web are enabled to become both producers and receivers of information, thereby bridging the conventional gap between production and reception.

As presented in the theory section on branding, crowdsourcing has been a widely used method of utilising the productive potential of consumers. Mark Deuze (2007: 45) argues that economies are increasingly concerned with producing, distributing and consuming products that have a cultural and informational character. Furthermore, Deuze (ibid: 48) observes that a culturalisation of the new economy together with an

27 For comparison, The New York Times poses a daily question on their Facebook profile: “What news are you discussing today?”
aesthetisation of everyday life has meant that consumers are more willing and able to modify, design, and innovate products themselves. New media technologies have accelerated these trends by transforming customer co-creation into what has been characterised as “free labour” (ibid.) or “gift economy” (Jarvis, 2009: 62). Companies have gone from making decisions in isolation to inviting consumers to improve their decision-making. This tendency is of key interest in this thesis, as the participating culture, which often pivots on certain brands, has become a new means of building people’s identity. As an institution, the brand may often compensate for the dismantling of traditional institutions. In line with Bauman’s notion of the late modernity (Bauman, 2000: 85), inviting consumers to participate in a social forum can be a way of engaging individuals in a brand community that provides them with raw material to build their identity, as many of the traditional values and norms have lost their importance.
As the examples above show, Berlingske actively seeks input by posting questions to its users, reflecting the company’s use of the real-time web as a form of crowdsourcing. In my view, it is not so much access to cases and information that makes up the most important value, as the branding effect that the openness and inclusiveness of asking users fosters. It means that the company may create a cohesive community, which again may create closer relationships between the brand and individual users. Or phrased differently: asking users for input may create an enhanced loyalty towards the brand. Thus, even if the crowdsourcing’s practical use is limited, the branding effect can be quite substantial, as Berlingske may develop its brand by demonstrating that the company listens and responds, and thus takes the customer seriously. Inviting users to participate in news stories also reflects that the process has become part of the product and the brand – a process that to a larger extent involves the end-users.

However, there are also critical remarks made by users on Berlingske’s Facebook profile, as the two examples below show:
Brian Laudrup har kraft – Danmark
www.berlingske.dk
Brian Laudrup er blevet diagnosticeret med en mild form for lymfekraft. – Danmark
September 7 at 3:34pm · Comment · Like · Share · Flag

2 people like this.

Lilli Westermann
Den kan han komme ud af igen ved at tage ansvar for eget liv og indstille med en streng diæt. På den måde slipper man for den skrækkelige kemo, og der findes ingen nem løsning –
Men det er han jo klog nok til selv at undersøge –
Også er det ...
See More
September 7 at 3:37pm · Like · 01 person

Thomas H. Perkov
Hvorfor skal vi vide at brian laudrup har kraft?
September 7 at 3:52pm · Like · 02 people

Susan Hartvig
Rigtig god bedring Brian :)
September 7 at 4:11pm · Like

Peter Vejse Møller
Det kan da ikke være et "Facebook emne"
September 7 at 4:17pm · Like

Trine Nordentoft Klausen
Usmageligt at lægge ud på facebook og formentlig ikke god pressesekte eller det er der måske ikke noget der hæder længere?
September 7 at 4:43pm · Like

Thomas Leth Madsen
... Jeg troede at BT var til den slags?
September 7 at 4:58pm · Like

Klaus Aagaard
Trine: Brian har selv udsendt en pressemelding. Når han gør det, må han vel være indforstået med at presse bringer det videre.
September 7 at 5:09pm · Like

Allan Iversen
Se og Hør udsender 31 ekstra numre og i farvel tiller:
September 7 at 5:29pm · Like

Berlingske Tidende
Tak for kommentarerne. Vi har vurderet, at nyheden er relevant for vores læsere på berlingske.dk, og at der også hør på Facebook ville være folk, som gerne ville høre om Laudrup's sygdom. Som Klaus nævner, er det ham selv, der har valgt at ...
See More
September 7 at 5:46pm · Like · 01 person

Dorthe Petersen
Jeg syntes bare mange af de nyheder I vælger at lægge på Facebook – har en "sensations"-præg over det.... Eller er det bare mig?
September 7 at 6:08pm · Like

Lars Pliedrup
hvordan kan man dog SYNES OM sådan en (pseudo)nyhed?
September 7 at 6:19pm · Like

Thomas Leth Madsen
Fair nok at medierne bringer nyheden når der er udsendt en pressemelding.... Men jeg har sgu stadig svært ved at forstå at berlingske føler at det er en af dagens mest relevante nyheder for sine læsere...
September 7 at 7:05pm · Like

Brian Hougaard
Baldersbæk @Astrid, Online bringer Politiken, JP, Berlingske, EB og BT nøglerigt de samme nyheder. Til tider er det de samme overskriver, hvorfor vælger I alle selektet det samme ? Der er døme langt mellem snapshot.
September 8 at 10:08am · Like

Berlingske Tidende
@Brian tak for din kommentar. De enslydende historier skyldes, at de kommer fra nyhedsbureauet Ritzau, som alle medierne abonnerer på. På berlingske.dk prioriterer vi dog vores egenproducerede nyheder højest.
mvh Astrid
September 8 at 10:25am · Like

Allan Iversen
Hmmm. Så skal vi altså bare selv abonner på Ritzau! Så kan vi spare en masse udgifter til aviser! :-)
September 8 at 11:01am · Like
Relating to the initial discussions on the company’s Facebook profile, Haug makes the following observations:

_We got several comments such as “give us some real news”, “give us some heavy news”, and “do you call that journalism? Come on!” etc. Then we began uploading more hard-core news on e.g., early retirement, cuts in municipal budgets, or a tax reform in the pipeline […] and we can see that people talk about, comment on, and reply to these news stories. So they resemble the idea of the typical Berlingske reader and they are present on berlingske.dk. These people want to discuss political content”_ (Appendix: 5)

After the initial observations on Facebook, Haug notices that people following Berlingske on the site are especially interested in political content. Political and financial news stories are preferred over “lighter” stories such as gossip and lifestyle. The examples above also highlight a potential misalignment between the company’s social media output and what Berlingske readers demand. As such, the target group and the segments that actively participate in the company’s online community can affect its output. Even though the community manager’s objective has been to adjust the output to the community’s demands, the examples above show that there can also be diverging opinions from the Berlingske community and the community manager respectively on how the content on Facebook should be prioritised.

Berlingske is interested in knowing what people think about the company’s products. As the examples show, Facebook can be a good forum in which to listen to as well
as interact with customers. By being active on Facebook, the company can gain valuable insight into customers’ brand experiences, both in terms of how customers perceive the brand and how they relate to the brand. In relation to the problem statement, we may conclude that Berlingske sees the real-time web as an enhanced opportunity to better understand its customers’ view of and wishes for the Berlingske brand, which again may improve the company’s output. This also confirms the hypothesis, as there seems to be a tendency on the real-time web towards an increased consumer influence on the company’s brand, albeit the company still “owns” a substantial part of the brand. On the whole, this reflects a shift from a one-to-many mentality towards a many-to-many conversational mentality, where the users engage in debates and form the stories that are produced, and hence shape the narratives that make up the corporate brand.

Lury (2006: 44) argues that we have moved “beyond a one-way model of exchange or communication and a single-stage transaction model of consumption to the advocacy of an ongoing ‘dialogue’ between producers and consumers”. This ongoing dialogue should be seen in relation to an observation made by Jarvis (2009: 60) that “people will contribute their intelligence and time if they know they can build something, have influence, gain control […], and claim ownership”. It can therefore be strategically fruitful for Berlingske to have a community manager who handles complaints, criticism, and prevents potential problems from escalating. In addition to news story input and making improvements based on customer ideas, the dialogue also creates stronger ties between the company and the consumers engaged in the Berlingske brand. As Astrid Haug puts it (Appendix: 14), giving users an online voice gives them an enhanced feeling of ownership and a closer connection to Berlingske’s media products. As branding theory has shown, brands are an integral part of popular culture wherein people get inspired to construct their ideas, lifestyle and identity. According to Arvidsson (2006a: 88), brands enable a context where people construct their own self and become subjects. Therefore, consumer activity involving brands is a domain where the individual is realised as people organise and experiences everyday life through brands.

People de facto engage in conversations about companies’ products and practices, and for Berlingske it has been rewarding to set up a corporate account in the online social
media sphere, as it has given the company a new platform on which to engage consumers in the Berlingske brand. As observed by Arvidsson (2007: 25), as the dialogue shifts to, for example, Facebook, the value created by user-led information and other forms of consumer information becomes pre-structured in a controllable milieu. Relating to the problem statement, this has been a key opportunity for Berlingske as the real-time web’s inherent interactivity has enabled the company to find new ways of giving consumers an augmented brand experience, and hence create stronger ties between consumers and the Berlingske brand.

5.1.3 Patterns of engagement
The community manager is not imposed to generate a monthly profit for the company. However, as in all other commercial enterprises, the final objective is to maximise profit. In this respect, the community manager at Berlingske is no exception. At Berlingske, the community manager does not have specific guidelines to follow that measure the appropriateness of the work that is carried out. Furthermore, Berlingske does not have a written document laying out the company’s strategy on, for example, Facebook and Twitter. Astrid Haug worked out a strategy when she was appointed, but given the constant development of social media, there seems to be no universal way of using the services, even though there are evidently wrong ways to approach them. For that reason, Berlingske’s approach to the real-time web is redefined and changes continually. In Astrid Haug’s words:

“I also have to update it [the strategy], but a lot of new things occur all the time so it’s sort of... well, in any case it will be a very dynamic strategy” (Appendix: 7)

When Astrid Haug began her work, she spent some time observing what the community on Facebook was interested in. Initially Haug had a hands on approach to the task: simply posting stories on Facebook and observing the patterns of feedback which the different types of stories triggered. Consequently, listening to the crowd - what people like to hear and talk about - has been a method for Berlingske to determine which stories to post on the company’s social media platforms. By posting content that fits certain expectations, Astrid Haug has been able to enhance the continuity of comments and discussions arising in continuation of journalistic news.
reports or blogs on berlingske.dk.

The community manager relatively quickly discovered which segments were active on the company’s Facebook profile. As Kaplan & Haenlein (2010: 66) have observed, a company wishing to engage with a community has to spark the interest of community members. From a business point of view, this implies that the person representing the company on the real-time web must provide people with a reason for engaging with the brand. Before Astrid Haug was employed as community manager at Berlingske, there was a debate on Facebook once a week or every other week. Today, the aim is to initiate daily discussions on Facebook. Another underlying aim is to direct people from Facebook to berlingske.dk, as more visitors there generate higher revenue.

Taking into account that identity creation has become a lifelong process, where individuals are likely to adopt different and conflicting identities (Bauman, 2000), consumers seek support not only to navigate the late modernity when engaging in the Berlingske community on Facebook. Berlingske also retrieves information from users to target stories and build the Berlingske brand in line with user/customer demand. Having a voice and a presence in the online social sphere is of key importance for Berlingske, as the company wants to be where its users are. Overall, there is an increased interdependence between Berlingske and their users in terms of which stories are seen as appropriate on the company’s Facebook profile. Because of the company’s presence on the real-time web, users have gained more power to comment on and interact with Berlingske as well as with other community members.

In this chapter, I have argued that users in the social media sphere engage in the co-creation of the Berlingske brand. This alters the way the company handles its brand, as Berlingske needs to take into account their attitude to its media products and engage in dialogues that are often driven by the community, dialogues that Berlingske has an interest in facilitating and stimulating, as they may create stronger ties between the individual user and the Berlingske brand.
5.2 SAS
SAS launched a Facebook profile the day before the volcanic ash cloud paralysed European and much of global air traffic.28 Although a lucky coincidence, the launch was a part of the company’s larger social media strategy. In addition to being present on Facebook and other influential social media services such as Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Flickr, SAS focuses on “socialising” its website by, for example, enabling people to announce their SAS flights on their individual Facebook profiles. Furthermore, the company develops its own websites with social media functionalities. The “Love is in the air” campaign, which I will elaborate on later in the analysis, is a part of this strategy. Another part of the company’s social media strategy is to monitor all blogs and communities on the internet involving the SAS brand (Appendix: 32).

5.2.1 The company’s incentive
Until recently, SAS did not have a person dedicated to listening to and communicating with SAS communities online. When I interviewed the Director of Online Strategy and Communications, Christina Ericsson, in June 2010, she was responsible for the Facebook site and Twitter accounts29 alongside the many other responsibilities of a Strategy and Communications Director. Nevertheless, due to the real-time web’s growing popularity and impact, and because of Christina Ericsson’s other tasks at SAS, she had advertised a post for a full-time community manager (Appendix: 42). This also reflects how SAS has started focusing more on how to communicate with customers on the real-time web:

“It’s an immensely large target group and SAS should be where our customers are, and if our customers are on Facebook, then we should be on Facebook as well” (Appendix: 33)

Being where people are has been an underlying premise for SAS to enter the social sphere – a sphere where people are already discussing the company’s activities. On

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28 A volcanic eruption from the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull and a subsequent ash cloud triggered a shutdown of most European airspace for one week in April 2010 (BBC, 2010).
29 SAS had several accounts on Twitter in June 2010, but the company has since centered their efforts into one account.
Facebook, the company can communicate much more swiftly, as customers can receive and respond to information as soon as it is published, thus improving SAS’ corporate communications (Appendix: 33). Moreover, SAS enters into dialogues with customers through a set of communication channels:

“then we have customer relations which help our customers, and the purpose then is to have an additional channel to the telephone, website and email, where it’s actually possible to engage in a dialogue, and so the customers can actually ask questions and get answers on Facebook” (Appendix: 33)

The phone and chat functions on SAS’ website make up important media through which customers can reach the company. Customer service is also a main purpose behind SAS’ Facebook presence. The staff working on the Facebook site and Twitter accounts are also responsible for customer support on the hotline and chat. Approximately fifteen and twenty employees work partly with customer support on the real-time web. Interaction with the customers on Facebook during the ash cloud proved to SAS how effective the platform can be when instant communication is needed to reach a broad customer base. Setting up a Facebook account is free of charge, yet the attention that SAS gives to the sphere makes it time-consuming and thus also costly. Despite this, the company has gained obvious advantages from being active on Facebook. I shall return to this later in the analysis.

In short, a prime incentive for SAS to set up Facebook and Twitter accounts has been to develop a new medium for customer services. When customers pose questions through chat or phone it does not provide additional value for SAS other than answering customers’ questions. Handling queries on Facebook in a sense broadens the widely used FAQ\(^\text{30}\) function on SAS’ corporate website. Both the FAQ function and Facebook/Twitter make SAS more efficient, as customers often have similar queries and can look for the answers themselves.\(^\text{31}\) In addition to the efficiency aspect, SAS’ customer service on Facebook also creates added brand value. As the forthcoming analysis shows, besides being a supplement to existing services such as

\(^{30}\) Frequently asked questions.

\(^{31}\) Looking up answers on Facebook might be especially useful in a crisis such as the ash cloud or a pilot strike, when customers have urgent inquiries.
chat and telephone, the company gets a new platform on which to carry out its branding activities.

### 5.2.2 The consumers’ impact

In their social media strategy, SAS has among other things focused on engaging with customers and monitoring brand-related conversations on the internet. The real-time web has provided companies with the means of increasing the scope of branding, product development, customer relations and other business activities. As the quote below shows, the internet offers a new insight into customer preferences.

“We have press releases and other forms of communication. Our site is quite static, you go there to get information and that’s about it. We send out press releases to journalists, and maybe they’ll write something... on Facebook, customers can turn to us directly and make us aware of things that we feel should be improved, made more distinct or be worked on” (Appendix: 34).

SAS’ presence on the real-time web also provides the company with other forms of value. In addition to answering questions, SAS can, as the example below shows, improve their business practices based on what users express on the real-time web.

 ![Tweet](http://gardkarlsen.com/blog/?p=815)

(tweet by gardkarlsen)

Here, a SAS customer expresses his dissatisfaction with the company’s services. The first tweet is sent immediately after the experience, while the later one is sent after writing a relatively detailed blog about SAS. As well as replying to the critique, SAS may also learn from both bad as well as good experiences. Even though the blog is
written as a critique of SAS, it mentions the free coffee on SAS flights. This is valuable information for SAS and has been a key focus point in one of the company’s projects (Appendix: 39).

“We have also begun to test different concepts. When looking at in-flight food, we also posted a question about what type of food people would prefer in-flight. We got fifty answers during a few hours, so we used that as input in the project” (Appendix: 39)

Furthermore, in relation to how customers may affect the company’s activities, Christina Ericsson states:

“Last week for example we told everyone about our new baggage policy, and it became quite a lengthy discussion and a lengthy dialogue, where we could sense that we had to communicate more clearly what our policy was. Apparently the website didn’t work, and this is something we can improve” (Appendix: 33)

Monitoring people’s comments makes it possible for SAS to be more proactive. At the time of writing, improving products and services are areas that will gain more attention in the company’s presence on the real-time web (Appendix: 33). Christina Ericsson also points out that SAS will begin to implement more systematic ways of leveraging customers’ creative efforts (Appendix: 39). Customers are not just valued for their purchasing power, but also as sources of information and direction.

The following quote relates to the company’s in-flight children’s policy. Here, Christina Ericsson refers to a public discussion on a social media platform that has had a direct impact on how the company approaches the “child concept”:

“And then there was a heated debate, where some preferred child-free zones and others were against it, you know. At the same time a child project is being carried out at SAS where we review our children’s concept, and when the project group sees the discussion among customers on Facebook, we make sure that those working on the project get the customers’ ideas for the project.” (Appendix: 34)
In addition to influencing the airline’s policy, the discussion also demonstrates how customers can influence the brand by discussing the company’s services - and thereby what the company personifies - in a forum that represents the SAS brand. By embracing various customer stances, SAS embraces the transparency brought about by increased interactivity. It may also be seen as a means of relying on customers’ knowledge and acknowledging that there is much value in customers’ productive effort. The crowdsourcing that SAS practices on the real-time web is an important way of getting to know their customers. This is in line with the theory on co-creation (4.2.4.), which demonstrates that companies have realised that they can get innovative ideas from the “wisdom” of the crowd. This is something that has fundamentally transformed the logic of production and consumption. When companies intensify their interaction with consumers, they amplify consumers’ influence in multiple ways, for example by incorporating them in the process of product development, service improvement and so forth. Seen in light of the problem statement, we see that SAS perceives dialogue and interaction which occur on the real-time web as an opportunity to gain a better understanding of customer demands. The company’s knowledge about consumers is therefore developed on the real-time web, as people are able to continually express their wants and needs. This also emphasises the open-ended nature of brands and their continuous transformation. Following Bauman’s argument (2000), this reflects an increasingly uncertain and rapidly changing world. The permanent flux that characterises late modernity means that little is predetermined and irrevocable. People demand constant change, making uncertainty an inherent part of contemporary society.

The following Facebook example demonstrates consumers’ active role in defining the brand, and the loss of control that the real-time web has brought about for companies and their brands. The company no longer “owns” the brand.
The example above shows the anarchic tendencies fostered by the internet. Besides starting his own “competition” on SAS’ Facebook profile, the user’s wall post encourages customers and enthusiasts to express more freely how they interpret the brand and what to put forward as the most important brand component. This
exemplifies the active role of users and the constant negotiation which takes place between users and the company in creating brand meaning. As we saw in the theory chapter, the internet creates new forms of action and interaction. As Thompson (1995) argues, media technologies have reorganised power structures. The example above illustrates how openness and visibility are managed and that the real-time web generates more diverse ways of perceiving the brand. In section 4.2.3, we saw that the brand enables people to engage in a process of negotiation of the self in relation to ever shifting demands of everyday life. When a brand is managed properly, people experience unity between the brand and the subject (Arvidsson, 2006a: 93). The example above might expand the meaning of the SAS brand, but it is not so much an ominous act as a way for SAS to deepen its customers’ relationship with the brand. This implies that people become subjects partly in the context of brands.

Not only has the enhanced possibility of individuals to express their attitude towards the SAS brand changed the company’s practice. As outlined in the quote below, the speed of communication that the real-time web provides also has noticeable influences on the SAS brand and the customer support that the company provides.

“We feel it already, for example if a customer asks a question and we need to search for the answer [...] we’re talking about minutes here, if perhaps ten or fifteen minutes pass by then it is not unusual that the customer will write “hello, why don’t you reply, is anyone there?” [...] it's an incredibly fast moving channel [Facebook], and if you don’t answer straight away, it will generate badwill, so.. we’ll get goodwill if we answer quickly” (Appendix: 35).

As emphasised above, the real-time web leads to increased customer control. The open nature of the new internet services, the speed of communication, and the interactive web architecture entail that users not only have acquired new communication tools, but that companies have to adjust their practices to the new and amplified digital media reality. The loss of company control when entering the online social sphere may also be seen as a means of increasing control over customers. This paradox and the fact that obvious advantages are attached to establishing “open”, unfiltered platforms on the real-time web where individuals can express themselves freely will be treated in the following section.
5.2.3 Patterns of engagement

SAS’ presence on Facebook and Twitter supports one of the company’s core values, which is **caring**. Besides **caring**, **punctuality** and **safety** are core values that underpin the company. Nevertheless, the company has chosen to focus on **caring** on Facebook and Twitter. SAS has estimated that **caring** is the most feasible value for the real-time web, as the interaction and the speed of communication that it enables support the company’s aim of customer care. A way of articulating the value on the real-time web is through positive and informal communication (Appendix: 33).

The examples above exemplify the light-hearted tone used by SAS on Facebook. Another interesting observation is the second example, which was produced during a pilot strike that affected SAS’ flights. Customers found it difficult to get through to SAS and posted questions on Facebook, asking where to direct their queries. Here, SAS was able to leverage the productive and costless effort of consumers, as a customer voluntarily provides other customers with relevant information and with a
twinkle in the eye asks for a reward. SAS acknowledges the effort and looks the customer in the eye with a reply that is seasoned with humour.

If we look at caring from a broader perspective, it is evident that the company’s Facebook profile amplifies the overall service that customers receive. The real-time web presents enhanced opportunities for SAS to communicate with and to engage customers in new and more dynamic ways. The internet enables customers to publish their thoughts effortlessly. If there is an alignment between what SAS does outside and inside the online social space, customers can help to give the company a positive image and a brand that is centred on caring as a core value.
As exemplified above, SAS can, by giving customers a platform from which to articulate their thoughts on the company, develop further what caring represents at the company, and how it contributes to the SAS brand. Caring is however not limited to the real-time web, but is also determined by the performance of SAS’ employees in-flight, at the airports and so forth. Moreover, these performances may generate positive side effects on the company’s social media platforms. When customers feel they are well treated, some are likely to post their experience on, for example, Facebook. SAS’ Facebook profile in particular contains a large number of comments like the ones above. The real-time web can therefore be seen as a sphere that creates new opportunities for the company, as people can express their positive experiences with the SAS brand on the platform. If there are negative comments, the company can moreover take preventive action. These comments are public and may generate goodwill and hence make up a brand value for SAS.

Christina Ericsson stresses the changing user patterns that have occurred on the company’s social platforms. From reading many negative comments on SAS’ Facebook profile, the Facebook team is now mostly confronted with positive posts (Appendix: 37). This is most likely a result of the company’s service-minded approach and the team’s effort to answer all posts on Facebook. SAS continually measures customers’ view of the company. Caring is also a key selling point, which is measured on SAS’ customer satisfaction index. According to Christina Ericsson, customers’ perception of how well SAS takes care of its customers has become
significantly more affirmative since the company became active, especially on Facebook (Appendix: 40).

At SAS, the real-time web is also used to announce campaigns, competitions, new services, and to distribute information. “Love is in the air” is an example of a campaign that utilises social media functionalities. This same-sex campaign has gained much media attention, as it is considered a rather unusual campaign for an airline such as SAS.32

The same-sex segment is an interesting commercial target group for SAS, being a high-income and quality-conscious demographic group. The decision to partly launch the campaign in the online social sphere carries viral potential, or a potential word of mouth effect, for SAS, as the same-sex community is well defined and often interconnected on the internet. As the examples below show, couples have been very passionate about spreading the word about the competition:

32 On love.flysas.net, the company has been calling for same-sex couples to create a profile and compete for votes. The winning couple is to get married on an SAS flight from Stockholm to New York. The contest was launched on September 1, 2010 on SAS’ Facebook site and later on the company’s Twitter profile.
In addition to posting on SAS’ Facebook profile, couples have used same-sex communities on the internet, as well as traditional media, such as radio and magazines, to spread knowledge about the campaign and hence also about SAS.
Besides appealing to an affluent target group, the campaign may give SAS a younger brand. The company has traditionally symbolised a safe, but also a bit old-fashioned and stiff airline. The campaign can therefore also be seen as an attempt to modernise the SAS brand.

Overall, SAS’ presence on the real-time web has given the company competitive advantages and a renewed brand. The company’s activities, especially on Facebook, have attracted much public attention. To name an example, Christina Ericsson receives at least a weekly request to give presentations at conferences and interviews about SAS’ Facebook presence (Appendix: 41).33 This indicates that the company’s presence in the social sphere adds value to SAS, as the company can better nurture its brand community and extend knowledge of its brand. The openness and relaxed attitude brought about by the company’s presence on Facebook also gives SAS a younger brand.34 In addition to an increased customer involvement that can push the meaning of the brand, SAS’ presence on the real-time web alters the company’s brand. Engaging in a dialogue on Facebook and Twitter shows a company that is willing to open up its communication in the public domain, which may give people the perception of SAS as a less conservative brand.

On the bottom line, we can conclude that SAS not only uses the real-time web for customer services, but also as a means of providing people with a platform where they can share their experiences with the SAS brand. SAS thereby also exploits the potential of creating stronger ties between the brand and its customers. Moreover, SAS learns more about the quality of its own services from active users on the real-time web. Finally, the company also stimulates online communication in order for it to evolve in directions that support the company’s core values, especially caring.

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33 The acknowledged social media blog, TechCrunch (Nigam, 2010), for example, highlighted SAS’ Facebook approach during the first day of the ash cloud in April 2010 as best practice. Børsen, the largest business newspaper in Denmark, has also written articles about SAS’ real-time web strategy. SAS has also promoted its Facebook activities in the company magazine, Scanorama (SAS, 2010: 86), which is distributed on all SAS flights.

34 SAS may even approach the image of its main competitor in Scandinavia, Norwegian, which is perceived as a younger and “fresher” airline compared to SAS.
5.3 Normann Copenhagen
When Michael Rying, Normann Copenhagen’s community manager, was appointed in 2007, the company did not have a web strategy. Michael Rying was employed to develop the company’s website and create an identity for the company on the internet. At that point, Normann Copenhagen was not searching for a community manager, so Rying actively sought out the company (Appendix: 18). As a private limited company with some 50 employees, there is a general attitude at Normann Copenhagen that new employees have to generate revenue for the firm to contribute to the overall return on investment. The community manager’s role is legitimised through the central position of social media platforms and the effect they have on the company’s reputation. Besides being a platform where customers as well as the brand are engaged, the services are also used internally for knowledge sharing and identity building, as well as sales offices around the world use Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and Normann Copenhagen’s blog to introduce and sell products to third party stores internationally. At Normann Copenhagen, the real-time web is seen therefore as an integral part of the company and its financial performance (Appendix: 26).

5.3.1 The company’s incentive
The company’s lack of an internet strategy and its limited size has given Michael Rying relatively free hands in shaping the company’s online profile. The community manager’s approach has been to tackle one platform at a time. Besides having a blog, the company is active on the following social platforms: Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter (Appendix: 20). Normann Copenhagen does not have a manual or overall strategy for the different online services, as, according to the community manager, there is no one-size-fits-all key to the real-time web. The company’s approach to social platforms is rooted in a need for experimentation and making quick decisions. For the same reason, there is also pronounced flexibility and room for manoeuvring between the community manager and senior management. As Michael Rying states, when speaking about the autonomy of the community manager:

“On Monday I might say “this it what we’re gonna do”... and on Wednesday I’ll say “well, I’ve changed it” and finally on Friday I might say “Guys, we’re not gonna go ahead with it” (Appendix: 20).
Furthermore, in relation to why the company does without a social media strategy, Michael Rying continues:

“If I look back at our social media activities only six months ago – not a year ago but six months ago – then it’s significantly different from how it is today” (Appendix: 22).

These statements stress the ever-shifting nature of the internet and the continual innovations that take place. The quotes not only point towards the swiftness of technological development, but also to the way people negotiate the technology and discover their own patterns of engagement and use through these negotiations. One could argue that the social shaping of technological innovations influences the company’s choice of opting out of a clear social media strategy: a tendency characterised by daily learning opportunities for the company that create new forms of engagement with customers. Michael Rying describes it as a fingerspitzengefühl, stressing the importance of learning more about how people engage with different media through practical experiences. The community manager’s experiences and the results that Michael Rying’s work has brought about make the real-time web the most significant platform for the company’s brand management today.

5.3.2 The consumers’ impact
Operating in the creative industry, Normann Copenhagen designs, produces, and sells design products to consumers. The more quickly the company can adjust to customers’ desires and behaviours, the more likely the company is to gain a competitive advantage over competitors. The community manager’s main tasks are to listen and learn from customers and actively involve customers in various processes.

“Can we test them [the products] on the social media and find the right price? Which colours should our products be? Which product variants should we place an order for? Etc. etc. Here I actually interfered with the core of the company’s backbone” (Appendix: 19).
As the statement above reveals, Normann Copenhagen has undergone a major shift after bringing customers closer to the decision-making processes and the management of the brand. As argued by Arvidsson (2007: 7), the productive user activity has become a valuable source of information for companies. This has also been the community manager’s aim: to learn from customers and create stronger ties between the company and its customers, as well as amongst customers themselves. It is not so much keeping designs secret that creates a competitive advantage, as having a strong relationship with a community of customers (Jarvis, 2008: 99). Nevertheless, this does not mean that companies should uncritically consider all consumer inputs, nor become completely transparent in relation to the development of new products. According to Michael Rying, product design will never become a democratic process.

“We’ll never be the ones that will open up and say, “bring your design and we’ll vote for it, and what the designers like the most, we’ll start producing”” (Appendix: 27).

In the creative industries, the shift towards a more inclusive creative process, expressed by greater user control, is seen as a challenge to the creative workers’ aesthetic integrity (Deuze, 2007: 99). At Normann Copenhagen, consumers are invited to contribute to the development and creation of new products. The company has also adopted people’s ideas in business processes and product development. However, there are limits to how involved individuals may become in product development. Nevertheless, Normann Copenhagen has previously asked users to come up with suggestions for a new product name, which has gained much attention and participation from the community (Appendix: 22). To give an example, the company had difficulty naming a newly designed lamp, but after asking the online community, the company received more than a hundred suggestions in the course of a weekend (Appendix: 25). Moreover, Normann Copenhagen has recently tested prototypes of different lamps on the various online social media, partly to identify an appropriate external product discourse.

“How do people react when they see it... in relation to colours, size, price? [...] How do people react, which words do people use to characterise it? [...] Of course we look at these things when we do press releases [...] if people say that it is totally retro then
it might be the retro-discourse that we should use, if that’s how it’s perceived anyway” (Appendix: 22).

Here, Normann Copenhagen uses the real-time web to involve customers and to get a pre-insight into how the product is perceived. Besides leveraging Normann Copenhagen’s knowledge about their target group on Facebook\(^\text{35}\) for example and relating this to their overall target group, the company also encourages a higher degree of ownership feeling within the community. When customers are given information about products before they are launched, it can foster a feeling of inclusiveness, loyalty and ownership, as individuals are invited to express their thoughts about a given product. Moreover, this may potentially improve product ideas cheaply. This approach reflects a company that perceives the brand as ideas that people can live by (Lury, 2004: 38) - a company that implicitly creates a brand that fills the ‘meaning gap’, which exists in consumers’ lives. Jørgensen (2002: 98) argues that a continuing search for an identity surrounds the consumption of certain goods and that the act of consumerism in modern society is where individuality is realised. The activities that occur in the branded communities on the internet can be seen as a part of an identity building sphere. Even though the community is not fully invited to develop new ideas and products, the company’s initiatives, especially on Facebook, may create a feeling among customers that they are part of the Normann Copenhagen team. In the light of the problem statement, Normann Copenhagen sees an opportunity for engaging their brand on the real-time web by inviting consumers to share their ideas on, for example, naming a lamp thereby bringing the brand closer to consumers and their identity construction. When the company effects a blurring of the line between the consumer as producer and the producer as consumer, the members of the community might experience more intensified alignment between part of their own identity and the Normann Copenhagen brand.

The Facebook example below demonstrates how Norman Copenhagen handles customers’ increased control over a branded product, providing it with meaning and functions that were not anticipated.

\(^\text{35}\) As of 25 June 2010, 74% of the people following Normann Copenhagen on Facebook were women and half of them were aged between 26-35 (Appendix: 21).
This is a concrete example of how customers can expand the meaning of a branded product. Customers build their own ideas of the brand, which might strengthen the relationship between the brand and the customer. Production has traditionally been inside a company (see Ch. 4.2.4) but as the washing bowl example illustrates, the value that makes up the Normann Copenhagen brand is partly produced by external components or “workers”. This example also shows that the company might exploit the loss of power over brand meaning to, on the one hand, deepen its relationship with customers, and on the other hand, as a means of further activating consumers by encouraging them to expand the ways in which the brand can be perceived.
Normann Copenhagen: Be creative and Win

For the third year in a row we would like to challenge your creativity in our Be creative and win challenge.

Deadline is 14th of October. The three categories are:

See More

Be creative and win
4 new photos

October 11 at 9:16am · Comment · Like · Hide Feedback (74) · Share

Anette Waaben Er desværre ikke kreativ selv, men nyder at se andre resultatér, så jeg vil glæde mig----
October 8 at 3:09pm · Like · Flag

Christina Jeppesen Super cool billede... ;)
October 12 at 10:06am · Like · Flag

Normann Copenhagen Hej Anette. Stem (ved at klikke på LIKE) på den mest kreative tegning og vár på den måde med til at gøre en kreativ glad.
October 12 at 6:10pm · Like · Flag

Christina Pedersen de er super føde :-(, kommer der mer
October 13 at 9:57am · Like · Flag

Normann Copenhagen Hej Christina. Deadline er først i morgen den 14 oktober... så det hæber vi.
October 13 at 10:51am · Like · 0.1 person · Flag

Christina Pedersen det glæder jeg mig til at se :-)
October 13 at 10:53am · Like · Flag

Are you creative? – If yes, show us what you can do by altering one of our product photos http://ow.ly/2R2HE
October 12, 2010 1:00:11 AM via HootSuite

Amazed by the very high level of creativity among the participants in... http://on.fb.me/cdOldN
October 8, 2010 2:30:51 PM via TweetDeck

Be creative and win by drawing something fun on our pictures. Learn how to participate here http://ow.ly/2RAS8
October 12, 2010 5:25:18 PM via HootSuite

Normann Copenhagen: Most Liked picture in the Be Creative and Win 2010 was "Design in progress" by Jesper Strange Kiltgaard Christiansen. Congratulations Jesper, you just won a €70 gift voucher for the Normann Copenhagen online shop.

October 14 at 1:19pm · Comment · Like · View Feedback (15) · Share
The examples above show how the community manager seeks creative input from customers. The company actively asks for a customer interpretation of the brand, which shows that Normann Copenhagen has given up some of its control over its brand. Thereby, Normann Copenhagen acknowledges the increased user activity on the internet and that companies can benefit from involving users in creating brand meaning. As such, Normann Copenhagen aims to find new ways of gaining control over the brand by surrendering some control. In relation to the problem statement, it can be concluded that creating stronger ties between the Normann Copenhagen brand and its customers is an essential part of how the company uses the real-time web. This also supports the hypothesis as consumers’ involvement in the brand is continually enhanced.

The statement below highlights another experience that the company has had with the open nature of the internet and the free sharing of ideas and knowledge which it fosters:

“We have cases where I’ve been forced to upload things, because someone had heard about it before we’d actually decided to write about it. The speed is impressive out there [on the internet], and people are eager to show the newest trend all the time”

(Appendix: 25)

Here we can see how the nature of the internet changes the way the company relates to its own business practice. The speed and openness of the real-time web have moved the company towards a greater degree of user involvement and an enhanced participative culture.

5.3.3 Patterns of engagement
Normann Copenhagen is a company that has acknowledged that there is considerable value in what people say about the company on the internet. In addition to receiving information from RSS and Google Alerts, the community manager pays daily attention to the company’s social platforms. Slevin (2000: 76) has observed that it is difficult, even today, to deny the significance of large-scale mass media institutions and their role in forming the public opinion. This has also been confirmed in the
interviews that I have conducted with media monitoring bureaus (Appendix: 48, 55). A new layer of digital demand has developed, which involves the social sphere on the internet, however, the demand for traditional media content, such as radio and television, has not decreased radically. This also underpins the claim that matured media for the most part do not vanish when new media arrive. In the two previous cases, this also became evident: the real-time web does not compensate for broadcasting institutions and traditional newspapers, and these media still have an impact on the corporate brand. Normann Copenhagen differs in this sense, as the company has a rather novel approach to branding and the media. Unlike the majority of companies that depend on both new media and matured media technologies, Normann Copenhagen has decided to focus exclusively on new media. The reason for this approach is well described by Michael Rying (Rying, 2009). What Rying stresses in the article, which can also be seen in the empirical material (Appendix: 29), is that the company perceives its value creation as being inseparable from their customers. Value at Normann Copenhagen is created in constant interaction with the company’s customers. Interactivity that occurs online has become the single most influential source for understanding what customers are like, what they fancy, and what their key interests are. Normann Copenhagen focuses on the interactive potential - a key characteristic of the internet - to engage consumers in the company’s products and in the Normann Copenhagen brand:

“When you can’t put a banner up in people’s face, you have to be interesting, attract, listen and participate.” (Appendix: 19).

In addition to being a key criterion of success, the statement makes clear that the company focuses on direct communication with customers and that web services exist that make this possible. As Slevin (2000: 177) observes, internet technologies enable individuals to significantly increase their ability to intervene in events that historically have been “beyond reach”. This is a key aspect behind companies’ focus on the real-time web. For Normann Copenhagen, the real-time web enables consumers to share company-related information and attitudes in a sphere where the company has an interest in being present. The public platforms that Normann Copenhagen engages in have also become an arena where people share ideas, to which the company would not otherwise have access.
As exemplified above, Normann Copenhagen gains insight into consumer preferences by encouraging people to choose their favourite colour for the Krenit bowl. Thereby,
the company also extracts brand meaning from a dialogue about a Normann Copenhagen product online.\textsuperscript{36}

Normann Copenhagen has been successful in aggregating people in a Normann Copenhagen social sphere, facilitated by the community manager who aids and influences the dialogue between interacting consumers. A huge number of companies have established profiles on Facebook and Twitter. According to Mette Morsing (Lykke, 2010), many companies use these platforms merely as a one-way channel, for example for publishing news and as advertising platforms. Information is predominantly channelled one way: from the producer of information to the receiver. In addition to introducing new products and uploading competitions, Normann Copenhagen also draws on the removed gap between producers and recipients of information and utilises the real-time web’s interactive potential to engage customers in building the Normann Copenhagen brand.

\textsuperscript{36} In another related post the community manager has uploaded the result of what colour was the most popular on Facebook and Twitter, thereby giving users feedback on their engagement with the brand.
As shown in the examples above, Normann Copenhagen uses the real-time web not only as a marketing/advertising platform, but also as a way of involving customers in
Normann Copenhagen’s brand in several ways. In one of the examples above, Normann Copenhagen links to its blog where the company has a list of hyperlinks to “interesting” or “cool” websites: websites that support the Normann Copenhagen brand. As I will explore later, the company uses its social platforms to serve a community that is interested in design and a certain lifestyle. As Arvidsson (2006c) has noted, people are willing to contribute on the internet if they feel that they get something in return for their effort. Normann Copenhagen’s “currency” is access to a brand community, where community members may achieve a sense of belonging and where a part of their “self” is realised. Partly due to the dismantling of historically strong institutions, people have become aware of alternative ways of getting things done – to construct, who they are. This has meant that the brand, as an institution, has gained greater importance in the identity constructions of individuals. Seen in light of the problem statement, it can be beneficial for companies to give their brand a presence on the real-time web, as the amount of time that consumers spend in the social sphere together with the interactivity that it fosters can establish a closeness between the brand and the consumer.
These Facebook and Twitter examples show how Normann Copenhagen manages to include and arouse the curiosity of customers about a designer’s visit to the company’s flagship store in central Copenhagen. By involving its customers in the event, the company may intensify its relationship with consumers and find new ways to foster customer loyalty and engagement.

Normann Copenhagen’s core values as a company are openness and honesty. The enhanced transparency created by the internet supports these aspirations, as it becomes more difficult to hide or hold back information. Normann Copenhagen’s frankness is visible on the company’s blog in the area “We hate”. Here, the company writes about people who copy their products, as well as other things that the company dislikes. This “frankness” differentiates Normann Copenhagen from competitors and may provide the brand with an edge. Moreover, this is in line with the company’s overall philosophy, which is centred on doing things differently and to “challenge the normal habitual way of thinking” (Appendix: 27). The view materialises when the community manager talks about competitors and the real-time web:

“Yesterday I wrote about Fritz Hansen, because I’d seen their egg chair and it looked fantastic” (Appendix: 29)
As well as developing the brand, the promotion of other products than one’s own can create added value for customers and the company. For the company, this demonstrates great reserves of energy. For customers, it provides them with additional knowledge about an interesting design that has been “quality stamped” by Normann Copenhagen, a company they trust. In the conversation below, we see another example of how Normann Copenhagen seeks to foster a certain lifestyle and involve likeminded consumers in a community that builds on certain shared values.
Normann Copenhagen’s contribution creates a community for like-minded people, who share the same tastes – typically relating to an authentic and slightly different or creative lifestyle. This is in line with Normann Copenhagen’s strategy to create a “complete” or corporate brand, and not merely a product brand (Appendix: 25). Also, this may be a way for the company to draw on the diminished status of traditional institutions, and to suggest alternative ways of creating a lifestyle and even an identity around brands: for example by giving individuals access to a community of like-minded people. Relating to this, Normann Copenhagen furthermore arranges trendy DJ events, photo exhibitions and special presale events in their flagship store in Copenhagen. As a result, people write blogs and update their profiles on, for example, Facebook and Twitter, not only taking into account Normann Copenhagen’s products, but also the various events and ideas that have emerged around the Normann Copenhagen brand (Appendix: 25). To sum up, one can argue that the community manager monitors and facilitates the interaction between users on the social platforms, and that Normann Copenhagen seeks to build a community around the company’s products and corporate values that materialises on online platforms as well as in physical settings.

5.4 Summarising discussion
Brand management has gone from the assumption that the brand is owned by the company and is communicated in a linear fashion from the company to consumers to an approach where brand equity is created in the interaction between the marketer and an active consumer (Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2009: 21). As the analysis has shown, customers actively discuss and engage with brands on the real-time web. The real-time web enables companies to enhance the relationship between the customer and the brand. Nonetheless, how companies approach branding on the real-time web differs, and there are diverging patterns of customer engagement in the online social sphere.

Taking a comparative approach to the three case studies, it is evident that SAS’ information traffic on the real-time web is more frequent and contains more input from users than in the other two cases. SAS’ customers are keener to spontaneously upload their experiences with the brand on, for example, Facebook. The other two
companies have to be more active on the real-time web to engage customers. Even if these differences do not concern the value of the received feedback, the degree of spontaneous customer participation on SAS’ Facebook profile creates an added brand value for the company - a value that Berlingske and Normann Copenhagen perhaps do not experience to the same extent.

If we look at the three companies and their activities on the real-time web, it is evident that all three try to encourage customer participation in various ways by asking questions, requesting user feedback, launching competitions and so forth. The aim of reflecting the company’s core values on the social platforms is a repetitive pattern in all three case studies. In addition to striving to reproduce the core values in the social sphere, these companies also actively aim to facilitate and build relationships between the brand and the customer, as well as amongst customers themselves. As the analysis uncovered, companies seek to build stronger ties between brand and customers by involving customers in decision-making processes and in the management of the brand. The brand has become more open-ended in the sense that the meaning that makes up the brand is partly created by consumers. With the internet’s omnipresence and decentralised division of power, consumer communities in the online social sphere have become more anarchic. A key challenge for all three companies is the greater speed of communication that the real-time web enables.

Besides being expected to readily and instantly respond to questions and criticism, companies also have to adjust their practice to their customers’ present demands. However, even though the real-time web is more egalitarian than traditional mass media, companies and customers are unequal in status. Customers have become more autonomous and may affect the perception of the brand. Companies nevertheless still “own” a considerable amount of the meaning that a brand is given. All three companies have found ways to involve customers in creating brand meaning, for example by endorsing processes that bring customers and the brand closer to each other.

Here, Normann Copenhagen differs from the two other companies, as the firm explicitly hands over control to customers, for example by asking for alternative ways of using the popular Norman Copenhagen washing bowl. This nonetheless corresponds to the company’s core values of being open-minded and somewhat
countercultural. As I also argue, this is, from a company perspective, not necessarily loss of control, as inviting customers to create meaning for a branded product might bring the customers closer to the brand. Besides being more experimental on the real-time web, Normann Copenhagen also differs from the other two companies in terms of the company’s choice of not using traditional mass media to build their brand.

Both Normann Copenhagen and SAS seek to strengthen the relationship between customers and the brand by connecting what happens within the brand community on the real-time web to what occurs in a physical setting. Interconnecting what happens within and outside the social community sphere on the internet is not part of Berlingske’s approach to the real-time web.

As I outlined in the analysis, SAS has the most detailed social media strategy. Berlingske has approached the company’s presence on the real-time web strategically, even if the strategy is not explicitly written down. Normann Copenhagen, on the other hand, has chosen to do without a social media strategy, partly due to the constant flux of the internet, which can also be seen in the company’s experimental approach to the real-time web. If the size of the companies is taken into account, the community managers at Berlingske and Normann Copenhagen are given a freer rein in managing the companies’ social presence compared to SAS. The airline is a large corporation and has to take into account a wide array of departments; the company’s underlying reason for being on the real-time web is to support its customer service activities. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that the community managers at Berlingske and Normann Copenhagen are responsible for the largest part of the companies’ output on Facebook and Twitter. SAS on the other hand currently employs between fifteen and twenty people that work partly on communication on the real-time web, even though the company’s community manager has the overall responsibility.

All three companies use the real-time web’s interactive characteristics to engage customers in building their brand. Moreover, all three companies bring the collaborative potential of the internet into play, for example by inviting customers to co-create various products and services. This has partly been practised in order to absorb brand meaning from customers’ activities. When utilised fully, consumers not only insinuate but also feel their identities become intertwined with the brand (Hatch
& Shultz, 2008: 31). As laid out in the analysis, the companies furthermore perceive this as an opportunity to let the brand express dimensions of who people are, and thereby contribute to partly create individuals’ identities around the brands of SAS, Berlingske and Normann Copenhagen.
6 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to contribute to the knowledge about companies’ use of the real-time web for branding purposes. This has been done by examining the opportunities and challenges that companies face when being present with their brands on the real-time web. The single most important empirical source has been a series of interviews with community managers at Berlingske, SAS, and Normann Copenhagen. I have made use of a theoretical framework that combines medium theory, branding theory and sociological theory to inform my approach in the analysis. I will now summarise the results of my findings, as well as lay out how those findings contribute to answering the problem statement: What are the opportunities and challenges that companies face when engaging their brand on the real-time web?

Even if being present on the real-time web challenges companies and their brands, my findings show that the advantages that the medium brings in most cases outweigh the disadvantages. The fact that a huge number of individuals, and thereby also customers, are active on the real-time web is an underlying condition for companies’ presence in the online social sphere. In all three case studies, the companies have set up Facebook and Twitter accounts, because they want to maintain a degree of control over their brands. Setting up their own accounts means that companies can keep part of the talk about their products/services in a more controllable sphere, something they cannot do on other sites where they are less capable of facilitating productive dialogues. From a business perspective, the real-time web is very much about enabling conversations and thereby handing over control through being open and accommodating. Moreover, this intensified involvement of customers has meant that companies have begun to leverage the opportunities that increased customer engagement facilitates, and companies now exploit customers’ willingness to engage as a means of retaking control, for example by creating communities on the real-time web.

The extensive diffusion of the internet and the interactivity that it has brought about have altered the communication infrastructure. On the real-time web, individuals can express themselves with ease and what is more, they seem eager to do so. This has
been a key incentive for the companies in my study to enter the real-time web, and this is also an underlying reason why the phenomenon is relevant for them. A pattern of engagement that characterises SAS, Normann Copenhagen and Berlingske’s use of the real-time web is the active engagement with their respective communities on Facebook and Twitter. The companies strive to engage customers in various ways not only to reduce uncertainty and retake some of the lost control, but also as a means of strengthening the relationship between the customer and the brand. Brands have become increasingly influential in modern society, and brands augment the economic value of products and services. The value is not only found in physical products and in the brand loyalty of the individual customer, but also in the social sphere and participating activities involving customers. Increased interactivity among customers and between companies and customers has meant that businesses have begun to leverage customers’ willingness to produce valuable information and even intellectual property. Co-creation or crowdsourcing has been a central tool for harvesting the fruits of customers’ creative efforts. This is not only carried out to gain a better insight into customers’ demands and to get “free labour”, but more importantly to reinforce people’s relationship with the brand. All three companies have experimented with the release of unfinished products and/or services to get feedback from customers. Besides receiving help from customers in the development process, this also brands the companies as being more transparent. My findings show that one of the community managers’ main tasks is to facilitate dialogues between customers, as well as between customers and the company. Crowdsourcing or co-creation has been a way of stimulating a closer relationship between customers and the brand, as customers are more likely to take ownership of a product/service if they are involved in its creation. This indicates that we have come beyond the separation of production and consumption, as an amplified co-creation tendency characterises an increasing number of business strategies. In an ever more fluid modernity where historically strong institutions have lost their importance, the brand as an institution has risen and has become an instrument in people’s need for anchoring their identities. Companies’ activities on the real-time web should be seen in this light. When community managers encourage co-creation, it is a means of deepening customers’ engagement with the brand.
As uncovered in the analysis, companies take advantage of the lowered entry barriers for engagement which the internet provides. As we have seen, people buy more than a piece of material when they buy a branded product/service; they also acquire its brand value and communicative potential. By engaging customers with their brands, companies have begun to benefit from observing the interactivity on social platforms and based on that extract brand meaning.

In this sense, companies have become more dependent on customers in their branding than they used to be. Brands are not merely owned by companies, but are negotiated in continuous dialogue with the surrounding environment. Businesses have begun to take customers’ feedback into account to a much larger extent than previously. The real-time web is part of the explanation as to why companies have altered their practice. As shown in the analysis, the real-time web has intensified the negotiation between the company and consumers. In addition, the real-time web has brought interaction into the public domain. Therefore, it becomes ever more important to nurture consumer relationships as this may generate greater customer loyalty, and failing to do so may prompt disloyalty. Community managers are important in handling these changed company-customer relationships, as they can cope with the speed of communication fostered by the real-time web, and constantly anticipate and interpret the dialogue to better understand and predict what customers will do. The position of community manager reflects both the challenges and opportunities that the real-time web exposes companies to. The speed of communication presents a significant challenge for the three companies. In addition to expecting instant, 24/7 replies to inquiries on, for example, Facebook, people may also reveal forthcoming products or simply criticise the company, which again may weaken the brand. Customers have become more autonomous in influencing how the brand is perceived. We see examples of this in the analysis, where customers began to upload their own interpretations of a brand/branded product not initiated by the company itself. On the other hand, this also turned out to be a valuable source of information for the company. Because of these advantages, firms have begun leveraging customers’ creative efforts by inviting them to participate in the creation of a brand’s meaning. The real-time web gives companies much greater scope for engaging customers in the branded sphere on the internet, created by companies in conjunction with their customers. On the real-time web, companies can build communities that interact with
greater proximity compared to traditional mass media. Community managers play a central role in the realisation of this potential, as they can manage “the affective dimensions of social interaction, making sure that a desired modality of interacting and relating arises” (Arvidsson, 2007: 10).

From the company’s perspective, realising that brands are open-ended and that the real-time web enhances this tendency has created new means of bringing brands closer to customers. As my findings have demonstrated, customers are active in the online social spheres that community managers build around corporate brands on Facebook and Twitter. In the instances where the branded community is well-managed, as we see in the three case studies, companies succeed in meeting one of the key criteria of brand success: to build a community around the brand that functions as a natural component in customers’ everyday lives.
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