THE FUTURES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN B2C MARKETING

From Business to Customers/Clients to Business to Community

Master´s Thesis
in Futures Studies

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis is a continuation of my research on social media marketing, since I already wrote a thesis in this topic over 10 years ago. Social media, as a marketing channel, has become a staple part of the business world. B2C stands for Business to Customers/Clients but it also presents Business to Community. It is the purpose of this paper to examine possible changes and movement in social media B2C marketing, and from there develop images of possible futures of this phenomenon in the next 20 years. Aside from studying the interaction between business and customers/community, risks and unexpected events are also discussed and taken into account. The assumption of this thesis is that, there will be changes and prominent movements within the two-decade timeframe. There is also an assumption that current trends (for example the emerging of social media marketing and the risk of data leaking in social media platforms) would continue and produce alternative outcomes. They would not magically disappear or easily be solved, and there would be a long progress from the present into different possible futures.

In order to answer the research questions, a focus group discussion was organized. Participants varied in occupation, age, work experience and working area backgrounds. They however all had hand-on experiences with social media marketing, both from the business standpoint or customer standpoint. Data collected from the discussion was fruitful and rich. From these data, I analyzed the phenomenon dividing into different themes: social media marketing as a phenomenon, risks of social media, corporate social responsibility, or the connection between business to community, and the last one is Wild Card events. Furthermore, I used Causal Layered Analysis to develop four different images of the futures with inspiration from Jim Dator's Four Futures. There are positive, negative, preferable futures, and also an unknown future with extraordinary Wild Card events.

To conclude, the research contributes to the understandings about social media marketing, including several important elements: risks, corporate social responsibility, and possible outcomes of social media marketing in the next 20 years.

Keywords: social media, social media marketing, B2C marketing

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Social media has always been an interesting theme for media and communication study. Emerging from the era of Web 2.0 in early 2000s when "the second generation of services on the World Wide Web emphasized online collaboration, connectivity and sharing content among users" (Delgado 2011, 33), social media has become a huge social phenomenon. It has gradually changed the way people think, act, connect with each other and do business. In the past 10 years, social media has emerged from a personal networking facilitator to a global multimedia platform, an important trading tool, and an essential marketing service. This thesis will observe, analyze and unpack alternative futures of social media marketing within the next 20 years. This two-decade timeframe was chosen after carefully justifying the objectives of this thesis, which will be discussed later in the objectives and limitation part.

The topic was chosen as a personal academic interest. I have an educational and professional journalism background, complemented by a media and communication degree, and have always had special interest in different types of media. Social media is my favorite research topic. Social media, while sharing some basic content rules with traditional media, was born in a digital age, works on real-time connection, and facilitates multiple dimensions of communication. It "eliminates the gap in space and time, providing platforms for people to connect, to learn about the world, and to multi-communicating" (Burgess et al. 2017, 360). From the business point of view, social media brings about more than just a marketing channel, it offers a tool to create, to nurture and to maintain a relationship between brand/organization and service users. In 2009, I wrote a master thesis focusing on brands' social media presence, and how they used social media in customer services. To me, in this thesis, it is of significance to observe the movements of social media within business world during the last decade, to reflect the changes and development, and to find out if there are some patterns of changes and driving forces that would help to predict and prepare for the futures. More specifically, this thesis' theme of discussion is social media in Business (B) to Customers/Clients/Community (C) marketing. This B2C not only covers business to customers but also business to community. How social media will contribute to or

disintegrate business and society in the futures of the next 20 years is open for further discussion and research. Unexpected futures are also investigated because this world "contains many other voices telling of the future, voices that the dominant culture may often ignore" (Hicks 1994, 72). The downsides of social media in personal security, identity thief risk and harmful contents will also be discussed.

1.2   Background

Social media is often linked to the most prominent platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Though there are more than that to social media (for example Tumblr, Reddit, Snapchat, etc.), the main focus, the most influential channels, the change facilitators really do lie within those above-mentioned names. Ever since Facebook and Twitter were born in 2004 and 2007 respectively, we have witnessed the impact of social media in everyday life, especially within generation Z (people born from mid-1990s to mid-2000s). Companies and organizations have a whole new group of consumers/clients who was born in the digital age. "Generation Z has been living in a world of smartphones and free Wifi for as long as they can remember. Ninety-two percent of them have some sort of digital footprint" (Deep P., Forbes News 21.09.2017). It is estimated in Facebook's annual report that as of the first quarter of 2019, there are 2.38 billion monthly active users using at least one of their company's core products namely Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Messenger (Facebook Annual Report 2018, 30.01.2019). With that impressive number, Facebook, as the biggest social networking service, has a global impact on every aspect of our modern life. Facebook and other social media platform can be accessed from all hand-held electronic devices, making them a crucial marketing channel for businesses and organizations at all level. However, while expanding impressively, protecting customers' data has become one of the most challenging tasks of all business and organizations. With millions of new accounts joining Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other platforms every year, the risk of losing personal data is higher, and has showed impacts in social media marketing practice, which this thesis will also examine.

As the world has become an online global village, business marketing has been changing too. It was because social media might provide endless opportunity but also ask for more corporate responsibility. According to Solis (2008c, 15), marketers not

only tend to focus on their own financial and networking benefit, but also need to engage in the conversation with their customers/clients. As mentioned above, the C in B2C also means community (or general public). Ideally, it is expected that social media marketing would create an informative, fruitful conversation between business and customers, and contribute to the well being of the whole society because a stable society would generally benefit businesses.

While developing rapidly, however, there have been growing concerns about privacy and information leak on social media. In April 2018, BBC News and many other newspapers and TV Channels broadcasted about Facebook's scandal, which leaded to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg being questioned by US Congress. "Facebook's data practices were the official topic of the hearing, prompted by its entanglement with Cambridge Analytica, a political consultancy that improperly accessed 87 million Facebook users' names, "likes" and other personal information. At one point in the hearing, Zuckerberg acknowledged that his own data had been accessed by Cambridge Analytica." (The Washington Post, 11.04.2018). There were other similar incidents in other social platforms. For example, in October 2018, Google announced that an additional bug in a Google+ API, part of a November 7 software update, and exposed user data from 52.5 million accounts. Or as Google puts it, "some users were impacted." (Yurieff K, CNN News, 10.12.2018.) Technological mishaps and data thief actually are not new phenomenon and are not exclusively to social media. In practice, political organizations, medical institutions, universities, local and international banks all face cyber-risk. For example, Forbes stated that over 1 million credit card data from the US and Korea were stolen within May and June 2019 (Su J., Forbes, 05.08.2019). Protecting customers' data is one of the most important tasks of all business and organizations. With millions of new accounts joining Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other platforms every year, the risk is higher, and has showed impacts in social media marketing practice, which this thesis will also examine.

1.3 Objectives and limitations

Objective of this thesis is examining the understanding about social media as a B2C marketing tool among people working in small and medium companies in Finland. It is to facilitate a discussion, and to find the meaning of such discussion to have a better

understanding about the futures of social media marketing. Furthermore, it is to understand the underlying reasons for choices people make, and to investigate forces that affect social media in present and future times. From the result collected, the thesis expects to open up new, little-mentioned alternative futures of social media in business life. Changes are clearly expected, because "changes in reality, occur not only because of new data, but also because of changes in how the data is constructed, paradigm shifts, and new stories of what reality is about" (Inayatullah 2002, 481). My thesis also discusses risks of social media from a marketing aspect and possible solutions for controlling those negative sides.

From my personal observation while studying and working in media and communication, within the last 10 years, social media has been changing rapidly with more practical functions and more user-friendly platforms. However, there has been neither any breakthrough innovation nor social life yet. For example, while adding MarketPlace as a special feature to allow small businesses promoting and presenting themselves in Facebook platform, there hasn't been any significant change in the way customers interact with business/organizations yet. Considering the urgent requirement to limit social media risks and business transparency, the timeframe of 20 years, therefore, was chosen to expect possible life-changing technological leap, as well as prominent social movement. Would social media still dominate, facilitating online marketing, or would it perish, giving way for a different type of media in a different technological platform?

The theme of the topic is narrowed down to B2C marketing, with B for business and C for both customers and community. In other words, the discussion will open up the connection and relationship that businesses have with their customers to general publics. "Social media" is limited in a group of biggest social media platforms, namely Facebook (and their other brand products: Instagram, WhatsApp), Twitter and YouTube. Other less popular social media networks will also be mentioned but with less intensity. Companies chosen are small and medium companies from different industries in Finland, they all have been working with social media platforms, and have actively participating in the development of social media marketing over the past 10 years. Although holding different education and career background, people contributing to my discussion have hand-on experiences and some have professional trainings in social media or communication and online marketing. The companies selected range widely from marketing specializing agency, import-export, and education to

engineering and computer sciences. While being a small research with limited participants, this thesis still aims to cover multifaceted issues of the topic, to dig into deeper layers of meaning and to contribute to a better understanding of social media's development in the future, especially within business area.

1.4   Research questions

The thesis seeks answers for questions about possible changes and movement in social media B2C marketing, and from there develop understandings about different futures. As described above in the previous part, considering business requirements for customers/users' safety and privacy and innovative possible achievements, breakthrough changes are expected, from both technological and social trends.

> - What are the possible futures of B2C marketing via social media in small/medium companies in the next 20 years? How will social media change? How will the interaction between business and customers/clients/community change?
> - What are the risks of social media in the futures? How do those risks affect B2C marketing in the next 20 years?

These questions are made based on an assumption that there will be changes, probably prominent, within the time frame of 20 years. There is also an assumption that current trends (for example the emerging of social media marketing and the risk to data leaking in social media platforms) would continue and produce alternative outcomes. They would not magically disappear or easily be solved, and there would be a long development from the present into different possible futures. The research objectives would be looked at from multiple angles and points of view, and from there, be thoroughly discussed, analyzed and generalized in hope of finding the answers for several possible futures of social media marketing.

2   THEORETICAL APPROACH

2.1   Future thinking

This thesis is a futures studies research, that is, the starting point of theories and methodology lies in future thinking, which separates futures studies and other sciences. While other sciences also prepare for the future, make plan for the future, they do not use future thinking as their main element and objective of research. On the other hand, "futures studies are the systematic study of possible, probable and preferable futures including the worldviews and myths that underlie each future. In the last fifty years, the study of the future has moved from predicting the future to mapping alternative futures to shaping desired futures, both at external collective levels and inner individual levels" (Inayatullah 2013, 39). There had been debates on whether or not futures studies should be a separate scientific discipline, as fore-sighting futures has been done in several sciences, but as futures studies theories and methods develop, they have gained academic credibility and been utilized in many different areas of research. The main theme of this thesis, which is social media marketing, is examined from futures studies' point of view.

As the research question looks at coming changes in the next 20 years, it is assumed that changes are expected in social media marketing. From different aspects of social, political, technological, economical, legal and ethical life, dramatic changes have been witnessed in how people use different types of media. For example, before World Wide Web, education system mostly relied on print books. People born on 1960s and 1980s might not differ much in term of how they acquire knowledge as a child. However, ever since the Internet was born in 1990s (Solis 2008a, 2), it has been transforming how people read, obtain information, and study. Children born in 2000s have been using Google on Ipads and laptops to read books and write assignments at a very young age. They are also able to attend online classes in another continent. Moreover, Artificial Intelligence, digital age, global village, to name a few, have changed the way we do business. Social marketing has becoming more and more significant, and sometimes they become the main channel for certain brands. For example, I had once worked for a small company named VietTravel in Vietnam, who sell tours and airlines tickets in Hanoi - Vietnam, with revenue of over €3m in 2018. They stated that 85% of their

orders was conducted via Viber and Facebook's MarketPlace and Messenger (VietTravel Agency Annual Report 2018, 08.2019). Social media, with Facebook's MarketPlace for example, has created new playgrounds for business, but where will business and marketing be in social media of the future? This might be answered using futures studies theory and methodology, because "the most significant is that futures studies create alternative futures by making basic assumptions problematic. Through questioning the future, emerging issues analysis, and scenarios, the intention is to move out of the present and create the possibility for new futures" (Inayatullah 2013, 36). It means that, in order to develop and prepare for uncertainty, studying and examining possible outcomes of the futures is very important for each and every one, for each and every organization and company. Reading signals, finding solutions, counting probable results of current events and actions are common steps of planning. This is where futures studies show their strength in providing systematic methodology and research tools. Every planning starts from future thinking, and should be followed by suitable futures research method.

Moreover, futures studies investigate environmental changes, track down social movement and mythologies, find underlying causes for changes, altogether to explore possible and probable futures, and figure out a way to create preferred futures. In order to do that, this thesis will adopt the fourth type of futures studies according to Inayatullah (2013, 26). While the first three types are: predictive, interpretive, critical, the fourth one is participatory action learning. In this theory, "the key is to develop probable, possible and preferred estimations of the future based on the categories of stakeholders. The future is constructed through deep participation. The categories employed are not given a priori but rather developed as cooperative practice. Those having interests in the future thus own the future. Moreover, there is no perfect forecast or vision. The future is continuously revisited, questioned" (Inayatullah 2013, 18). When social, political, cultural, economic and technological life is transforming, whether or not will social media innovate to facilitate B2C marketing, and whether or not social media marketing will truly create valuable contents and contribute to the community? Those will be discussed later in this thesis.

2.2 Images of the futures

The most important theoretical approach that I use for this thesis is images of the future. In order to answer my research questions, it is necessary to use mental models to create alternative images of the futures. Thinking about different possibilities according to current situation has always been a nature of human being. We think about what would happen tomorrow, 10 years ahead, or when we turn 60. We always think about the future, image what it would look like. With each important social, political, economic, and environmental change, we naturally predict what would happen next, based on our own knowledge about the world, our education background, and our own character. In futures studies as a science, we use more than human instinct, but mental tools and research method to think and create collective images of the futures.

Unlike in scenario thinking, in which alternative futures are built up based on different points of views, with tangible plans to get there, sometimes with quantitative strategies and countable steps; images of the futures are understandings and mental imagination about the futures. According to Rubin (2013, 2) "throughout our lives we human beings hold and develop images of the future, some of which are very personal by nature, some others are clearly socially shared. Some of the images function on a conscious level, while some others influence our decisions, choices and estimations on the unconscious level". Throughout human history, people have been collecting knowledge about the past to learn about patterns of changes then from there develop research tools to study about the future, to make it more predictable and to bring the most preferable future to life. "The need and desire to know about the future is a human characteristic" (Rubin 2013, 3). But how do we have those images about the futures? What mental tools do we need? It is very often that, under certain scrutiny, understandings about the futures are underestimated because they are indeed assumptions. Unlike the past, when we already have all the empirical data to analyze, future is yet to happen, and any assumption might be proved wrong. Then how do futures study make sense? In futures studies as a science, studying the future is based on available data and scientific assessments. In order to do so, we need to construct mental models (Rubin 2013, 2). Those mental models are built from presumptions, opinions, beliefs, actual facts, common and specialized knowledge about the world, about how the society functions, how business runs, how human reacts to certain things and so on. Therefore, those images created are not random thoughts. They are systemic information "drew up" into imaginative and vivid pictures. They need mental skills to

be built up. "They emerge as hopes, fears, expectations, and therefore influence decision-making, choices, behavior and action. Therefore, their impact on human motivation is very strong: with our decision, we either aim at making the future happen which we cherish in our positive and desirable image, or we try to avoid the negative and undesirable future from happening. They have the ability to affect our life and fate. They are held and developed by individuals, groups, or institutions – i.e., all the different actors in society" (Rubin 2013, 3).

It is within future thinking point of view that this thesis aims to conduct these images of the futures of social media marketing. Because images of the futures are created from different points of views of different people, there are contradictory factors involved, making it more difficult to image a coherent image. Subjectivity is unavoidable and thus while forming multilayer structures of each images, there will be some "hidden and unarticulated" meaning/elements (Rubin 2013, 6). Moreover, not all knowledge and facts are "actual facts", because they are influenced by social beliefs, religions and confidential political acts. This is in nature a challenge of futures studies, and of any future-oriented research. However, while analyzing the futures with all possible data and knowledge, and not focusing on personal hopes, fears and expectation, the outcomes would still be scientifically relevant and useful for decision-making process.

2.3   Jim Dator's Four Futures

Another important theory part that was used in the thinking process, as well as research-conducting steps of this thesis is Jim Dator's Four Futures theory. Dator (1998, 7) argued that images of the futures was one of the deciding factors influencing the future. It is because "people have different images of the futures, based on their own knowledge, background, leading to their actions or inactions" (Dator 1998, 7). To be able to think about the future and picture about possibilities is the first step in planning for the future. It is of human nature to expect contradictory outcomes, since we have learnt a lot from history. A good event might turn bad at the slightest twist of related events, and something seems bad might change into opportunities for many people. In business life, we have witnessed this more than once. For example, Alibaba, the biggest Chinese online commerce corporation, started small and then became a giant with revenue over €400b after the SARS epidemic outbreak in 2003 (Huddleston T, CNBC News, 26.03.2020). We have seen cases like this, and we expect many similar events in

the futures. From our own knowledge, we build up in our head our own versions of the futures. Those images "can be optimistic or pessimistic, frightening or enabling, paralyzing or motivating, weak or robust, unexamined and naive, or fully researched, articulated, tested and developed" (Dator 1998, 7). However, no matter how different those images is for each and every one, they all fall into main four categories:
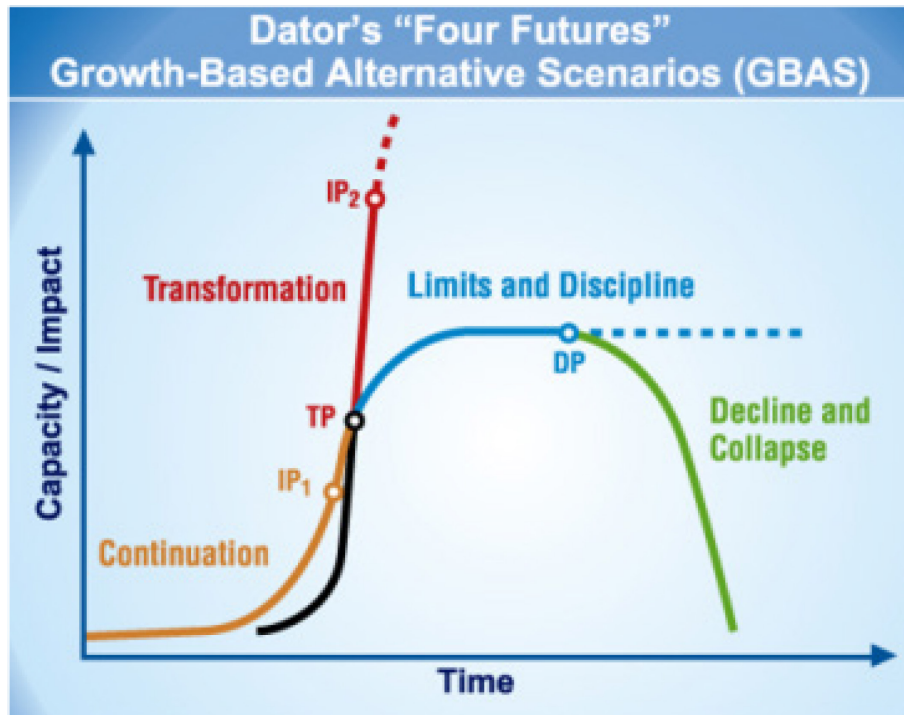
Picture 1: Dator's Four Futures (Dator 1979, 26)

As seen in the above graphic, the **Continuation** future usually means a continuing of development in a positive point while the **Collapse** one is the downward trend, maybe caused by one or several reasons. For example, it might be environmental damages, natural resource exhaustion, economic instability, wars, natural disasters, accidents, etc. **Limits and Discipline** image is the future in which damages are controlled, social values are protected, and the world is generally organized and stable. This is more or less the "ideologically correct society of the future" or a "preferable future" (Dator 1998, 23). The last one is the **Transformation** picture of the future, in which high-tech, high-spirited social values replace current forms of society. These four images, according to Dator, is the "basic deductive forecasting futures technique" (Dator 1979, 375). Without any knowledge about future studies, we would still naturally picture in our head the good, the bad, the average and the unknown future. However, in order to precisely create these images, it is important to understand driving forces, signals to

have a collective understanding about the connection between different aspects of life (social, economic, moral, environmental, technological, political, etc.) It is also future studies' purpose and intent to give those images of futures deeper meanings, giving way for strategic foresight and future planning.

While I became interested in this research topic, I used common sense to think about the future, then later on when I collected empirical data and build up my list of questions for the discussion, it was Dator's Four Futures that helped me to clarify the differences between those images and categorize them. What is more interesting is, it is essential to recognize that "all four change stories are often being told by different parties at the same time. Each can be a valid perspective for the interest groups telling each change story. Another insight is to realize that each of us, and our clients, tell all four of these stories at different times" (Dator 2019, 56). One image would be a good one for someone, while being the bad one for another, considering the variation in age, nation, and society of each person or group of people. For example, during this current Covid19 epidemic, while many people working in services, tourism and catering went bankrupt, pharmacies, online commerce, and grocery delivery have been enjoying their economic development. It is therefore important to take a neutral stance while looking at society as a whole and consider which would be a preferable or plausible future for it (the society). Here is where futures studies give way for a deeper layer of meaning, providing enormous data for researcher to analyze, and for strategy makers to consider their action plans. Furthermore, for foresight professionals, "discovering which stakeholders represent each point of view, and describing any other hybrid views that may exist, is thus a great first learning point" (Dator 2019, 57).

2.4   Wild cards

Wild card is an important part of future thinking and also in futures studies in general. While people make assumptions, predict and create future images based on what they know about the present and the past, there are also some degrees of uncertainty in all plans. The utmost, catastrophic uncontrolled future would belong to Wild Cards, or very dramatic, degenerative, damaging events that might happen. Might it be war, natural giant disaster or man-made catastrophe (for example: nuclear plant exploded, worldwide economic crisis), they all are extreme events that would drive the future into a different path. Some wild cards already have signals, namely religion conflict leading

to terrorism, environmental crisis due to over exploitation of natural resources. Some wild cards are truly unpredictable events (earthquake, tsunami, extreme traffic accidents). While the purpose of futures studies is to study possible outcomes of the future, and from there develop certain action plan, it needs to deal with totally unknown risks because "one of the main insights of futures studies is that the future frequently comes in the form of surprises" (Petersen et al. 2012, 1).

There are three major factors directly affecting foresight methodology, including: Trends (driving forces that provide fundamental direction to the future), Cross-impacts (trends interacting with each other) and Wild Cards (low-likelihood, high-impact surprises) (Petersen et al. 2012, 2). The reason why the concept of Wild Cards is important to this thesis is that, other than driving forces and low-impact surprises, the uncertainty of Wild Cards might change the whole picture of the future. Life is ever changing, and human history has witnessed countless unexpected life-altering events that instantly changed the whole world order. For example, the Haiti earthquake in 2010 killed over 300.000 people in one day (CNN News, 12.12.2013). Lately, we are all living in an unprecedented time of Covid19 epidemic, which was unexpected, came without any clear signal, and yet has an unimaginable impact on every aspect of life in a global scale. Therefore, Wild Cards are frightening yet unavoidable factors that researcher always have to take into account while articulating future thinking. As each extraordinary event happening has different impacts on different elements of life (human life, animals, the environment, political relation, economic bonding, etc.) assessment of Wild Cards is as important as identifying them. To decide what Wild Cards might be on the table, it is necessary to brainstorm extreme events that might happen by learning from the past, to take suggestion from scientists in different areas, and to look at the world from multiple angles.

As each person is affected by an event differently in future studies, the assessment of a Wild Card depends on a fact that a Wild Card uses a hierarchy of factors. "The most fundamental of the factors that influence who we are and what we do are those that are associated with being: Our perception of reality, Strongly held personal values, Our health or wellness, and the physical environment in which we live" (Petersen et al. 2012, 5). While people with different background will realize that their assessment of those factors varies widely, there should be a common goal, like health and wellbeing in general of all human being, freedom and humanity. In my thesis, Wild Card is an important element of the discussion, providing extraordinary details for building images

of the futures. While the concept of Wild Cards is somewhat common knowledge when most people understand that it means extreme and life-changing event, examine them with systematic thinking requires some creative and innovative training. Petersen suggested three basic rules: Rule I is "If you don't think about Wild Cards before they happen, all of the value in thinking about them is lost" (Petersen et al. 2012, 7). The value of Wild Cards approach is that we have some level of readiness, to be able to take actions, to minimize the impacts, to take care of our human society and the earth in which we are living in. Rule II is "accessing and understanding information is key" (Petersen et al. 2012, 7). The more informed we are, the better we can be prepared for Wild Card events. The process includes identifying early warning signs of a Wild Card, understanding its structure and developing a sophisticated, effective information gathering method. This process requires knowledge from multiple sciences, politicians, and environmental activists in order to create a network of information and wisdom, experiences and analysis. All are to achieve an open-minded, innovative way of thinking and understanding. The last rule, Rule III emphasizes that "extraordinary events may require extraordinary approaches" (Petersen et al. 2012, 9). This is the most difficult yet needed element to examine Wild Cards. If some event changes the whole world, there should be world-changing intervention, innovation and reinvention throughout the economic, political, social, educational, governmental system in order to cope with it. These reinventions might come from new technology and science advancement, but at the same time should come from a change in social values, as in the way people accept certain new world orders. "If we are to respond effectively to certain Wild Cards, we will also have to redefine basic concepts such as: self-interest, national security, standard of living, work, etc. We will almost certainly have to reinvent all or most of our educational system, government, economy, families, and military". (Petersen et al. 2012, 9)

Wild Cards being a very important concept to my thesis are not only because the timeframe of this research is 20 years, but also because we are now confronting many foreseeable problematic signals. For example, the religious conflict between Islamic extremes and Western countries has driven human being apart, giving a breeding ground for terrorism and nation separation. It probably started after the 11.09 terror attack that killed almost 3000 people in New York (CNN News, 27.07.2013), which was a painful catastrophic event in human history. This Wild Card not only shocked the whole world, it has silently changed everyone's life for good. The world would never be

the same after that event. In the present time, we also are facing environmental crisis, political conflict between China, the USA and Russia, humanity crisis, technological threats (citizen's privacy and data leaked), and so many more (He L for CNN Business, 19.05.2020). All of them have direct and indirect impact on how people work with social media. Taking Wild Cards into consideration is therefore an essential part of building images of the futures of social media marketing.

2.5   Social media marketing theories

Because the main theme is social media analyzing from an innovative and future-oriented thinking, this research also adopts Brian Solis's theories of social media, marcom and peoplenomics, which help to explain the significance of social media marketing. The reason why I find Solis's ideas and thinking relevant and helpful is because I have followed his analyzing about social media marketing since 2008 and seen that he does have future oriented assessment. Over the past 10 years, social media, leading by the most popular Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, has developed into a whole new culture and new way of life, as well as an important tool for marketing and PRs, just like Solis predicted in his books and articles publishing within 2008-2010 period. According to him, social media is "the democratization of content and the shift in the role people play in the process of reading and disseminating information (and thus creating and sharing content)" (Solis 2009, 12).

The concept of *marcom* is described as a combination of marketing and communication. According to Solis, over the years, "communication has evolved into a one-way distribution channel that broadcasts message at targeted audiences" (Solis 2008a). The problem was that, in the process, communication paused to focus on the marketing aspects of "top-down message push and control" instead of a genuine communication. Solis suggests a new marcom in which conversation, engagement and actions will replace advertising messages, eyeballs stickiness and click through attraction. Solis calls it "conversational marketing". He stated: "in the world of marcom, we're simply placing the communication back in communications. It is the transformation of monologue to dialog and it is breaking down that walls and barriers that separate people from brands" (Solis 2008c). In previous years, communication focused too much on the media, not on the audiences and the true meaning of communication process. However, in a social media context, communication study is

experiencing a socialization and humanization in the communication system and process itself. "This socialization is unique. Social media are offering new tools for everybody, every organization to participate online in "people-powered communities" (Solis 2008b). Marketing has changed to gain more understandings and social values rather than focus solely in commercial benefits. Solis calls this *peoplenomics* that is a special economy in which people are central and values are created in humanization context. While this concept was created in 2008, it was proven over time that human, with their personal interest, background, wishes and hopes, individual education and career are the focus of any business. To connect with, to build up a two-way conversation and to develop and nurture a relationship with customers, current or potential, are becoming more and more important.

In this new era, people are center of any business and communication activity. The boundary between marketing and PR have blurred on the Web because both of these two disciplines focus on "delivering content at just the precise moment the audience needs it by using direct, interactive communication mechanisms facilitated by social media" (Scott 2008, 7). As every business has information that can contribute to the education of certain customers, marketers are expected to deliver more added values by providing educational contents. In the web-based communication of social media platforms, marketers are to engage the customers into a process of justifying the assumed customer values of the organizations, and thus build up a customer-organization relationship through truly understandings and appreciations. Aiming to provide valuable information, educational added values and building a trusting relationship with the customers base are important steps for organization in order to create real brand value. This process also contributes to the society's overall educational level and improve corporate social responsibility. This is where we have the special B2C marketing, with C stands for both Customers/Clients and Community which is the main theme of this thesis. In a preferable future, this B2C relationship plays an important part to keep the world stand strong through extreme conditions.

3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH MATERIAL

In this thesis, focus group discussion was used to collect data, and Causal Layer Analysis was chosen to study and analyze such data. Within the scope of this topic, qualitative methodology seems to be more suitable, because the research questions are answered based on the perceptions, ideas, assumptions, examination, articulation and description of people working in social media marketing. By using future thinking and creating different images of the futures, they provided knowledge and wisdom that contribute to the understanding of the main topic. The methodology was chosen after considering the scope of the topic, time and academic requirement.

3.1 Focus group discussion

Considering the objectives and limitation of this thesis, focus group discussion was chosen as the method to collect empirical data. As Goldman described: a focus group is "a number of interacting individuals having a community of interest" and to be used to "seek information that is more profound than is usually accessible at the level of interpersonal relationships" (Goldman 1962, 70). In contrast to quantitative methodology that require a large number of participants, focus group discussion works in a small group. When a group of 8-15 people are invited to the discussion, a moderator will lead them through several small topics within the main themes. People discuss openly and develop their answers according to other people's responses. Usually being held within 1,5-2,5 hours, this selective discussion allows "genuine discussion among all its members" (Goldman 1962, 72). Within a small group, participants feel that they are indeed "listened", and thus open more to alternative ideas. Despite consisting of only 8-15 people, the data collected from those discussions are generally very rich, valuable and void of artificial responses, and thus have a validity that are not easily cultivated from other research methods.

The reason why focus group is specifically suitable for this thesis is that, it facilitates the creativity and reasoning of participants when thinking about the futures (of social media marketing). The objective of this thesis is a contemporary phenomenon, which attracts both positive and negative responses. The contexts are also interchangeable, that is, each participant can be in many different positions in social media marketing theme.

They can either be a service provider, a potential customer, an existing brand who would like to take their part in social media platforms, or they can also be irritated social media users who despise online advertising. While discussing within a small group, they can express their thinking, idea and expectation, like and dislike, hope and fear about social media from their various standpoints. The data generated is therefore very multidimensional.

However, like any other methodology, focus group discussion has its own limitation. It has been criticized to have "small sample numbers and the idiosyncratic nature of the discussion" (Steward 2007, 12). It also has a potential problem that moderator's biased ideas might have impacts on the responses, because as a facilitator, he or she could knowingly or unknowingly provide suggestions to achieve a group consensus. While in-depth answers are expected, it is important for the moderator to keep an unbiased standpoint. Time and cost effectively, focus group, however, is an effective way for researcher to have a proactive discussion with participants, take note of the content and also observe nonverbal responses, which "may carry information that supplements and on occasion even contradicts the verbal response" (Steward 2007, 20).

Within the scope of this thesis, focus group discussion provides necessary tool for empirical findings, and explicitly helps to answer the research questions. With focus group discussion, the small size of the group indeed helps in making the discussed process enjoyable and valuable. People are listened and deeper thoughts and ideas are generated when they do not have to wait for too many speakers, as well as do not have to follow too many speeches. With some brainstorming in advance, focus group discussion does give way for a rich data collection, with questions being thoroughly discussed and studied from each participant's standpoint. Facial expression, body language and the active participation also generate valuable data.

3.2   Causal Layered Analysis

CLA was chosen to analyze research material for this research because it was applicable with data collected from a focus group discussion. Since "CLA is based on the idea presented in cultural studies and sociology that, behind the conventions, decision-making processes, and daily operating models of every culture, there is a deep, cultural code system" (Rubin 2017, 17), it would provide deeper meaning analysis. Considering

the nature of research data, which was collected from personal experiences, knowledge via the discussions, CLA could be used to draw out "hidden reasons behind everyday decision-making" (Rubin 2017, 18) and provides critical futures studies thinking. Unlike questionnaires and interviews, the focus group discussion did provoke many interesting interactions and debates within several main themes of the topics between participants. Taking into account the variety in backgrounds, careers standpoints and personal experiences of each member, there were multiple points of views, examining social media marketing from different aspects. These data, though from a small sample, fit perfectly into the requirement of Causal Layered Analysis.

Importantly, "Causal Layered Analysis implies a rather radical philosophical position where all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is ultimately seen as rooted in cultural beliefs about reality" (Minkkinen 2013, 27). This is actually true because any knowledge or understanding of human is already filtered via their own lenses, which was created over the time, depending on their upbringing, cultural and political background. This also considers meanings of nonverbal expressions, posture and temperament of focus group discussion participants. "The layers of CLA as an analytical tool in understanding subjective perceptions of reality rather than claiming that reality as such is layered in this way. Reality is complex and cannot be grasped or explained by any simple means, and analytical tools such as the layered structure of CLA is useful for understanding it" (Minkkinen 2013, 28). In futures studies, when discussing about possible images of the future, it is usually not possible to separate neutral ideas generated from scientific facts and knowledge and ideas already influenced by the person's beliefs and culture, because we would never be totally neutral when assessing social and cultural issues. The images of the future each person creates have cultural objects and social perception, deciding where the development of the whole society would be. The anticipations reflect each person's knowledge and cultural standpoint. It is therefore has multiple layers of meaning.

An important aspect of CLA is the assumption that the myth, worldview and social context layers in a sense create problems as they are seen on the litany level (Inayatullah 2004, 3). There is a causal relationship between CLA's levels. The issues on the surface (litany level) have deeper roots in social constructions and social movements at a deeper level. Finding the deeper layers from data collected in a focus group discussion requires a base of knowledge, because these meanings are not directly discussed. People might not explicitly talk about their own beliefs or religions, or what shape their worldview,

but they show in their dialogue, their speech and their nonverbal expression. It is therefore very important to capture those nonverbal data for analysis.

4   DATA ANALYSIS: CENTRAL THEMES

The process to collect data from a focus group discussion lasted 2 months in May-June 2019. Focus group participants were invited from a various background. They vary in the area of business, age, education background, nationality, gender, and work experience. They come from all different path of life, ranging from MBA students (who was also a banker at the same time) to entrepreneurs in IT, and import-export to a Marketing manager from an advertising agency. In total there were 7 people (1 business provider who are also board member of the business center), 2 entrepreneurs, 1 marketing manager, 2 students and 1 freelancer in IT). While differed in many aspects, they had two things in common, that were their hand-on experiences with social media marketing and their interest about the topic. The invitation (see Appendix 1) were sent to 12 people, and only 7 people who found the research interesting and wanted to contribute to it did respond come to the meeting. Before the discussion, all participants received a short introduction about future studies, future thinking and the main theme of this research (see Appendix 2). They also received a long list of open questions (see Appendix 3) to help them brainstorming for the sub-topics.

The discussion was held in an open-air meeting room, in a co-working space office for one and a half hour. All members actively participated and contributed generously to all sub-topics. The most interesting result was that each participant gave several different perspectives on each sub-topics and questions, according to their varying standpoints, where they were either a business provider or a customer. The discussion was recorded with consent from participants and transferred into a script for further analysis. All small details about nonverbal expressions were noted in the script for further analysis. The recording and script are confidential and would be deleted after this thesis is submitted. Explaination for each participant's career background can be found in the reference list.

Although all participants were not familiar with future studies as a science, they did have certain knowledge about future-oriented thinking and strategic foresight. They were introduced to simple concept of images of the future and were encouraged to generate their ideas about possible outcomes of social media marketing in the next 20 years. Starting from telling one another about their own personal and work experiences with social media, following by their assessment about the phenomenon's development over the past 10 years, the discussion moved to the current risks of social media

marketing, problematic social issues that might affect social media in business life, to discuss about their perception about the future. Although never done any research in futures studies, participants were somewhat familiar with possible futures, plausible and preferable futures, mostly because they all had knowledge about strategic planning. From the data collected during the discussion, including nonverbal messages, cultural and educational background of the participants, I have categorized my analysis drawn from the discussion into four main themes, which will be discussed shortly below. The result from the discussion has valuable ideas and suggestions, and indeed contributes to the understanding of social media as a marketing tool, including the good and the bad, the past, present and the coming future.

4.1   Social media marketing as phenomenon

It was wholeheartedly accepted in the discussion that social media, despite its disadvantages and risks, is a social and business trend that "everyone has to follow", as stated by Focus Group Person 1, a Marketing and Sale manager. Looking back at the history of social media, it was seen that, with the development of digital age and new technology, which allows people to share more types of contents, at real time and to unlimited audiences, social media has become more and more influential. After the time of blogging sites in 1990s, social media began to gain popularity with the intervention of Myspace (2003) LinkedIn (early 2002), Photobucket (2005), Flickr (2004) (Edosomwan S. 2011, 2). More profoundly, YouTube (2005) and Facebook (2004) experienced a booming in social media users. It was estimated by Facebook that as of the first quarter of 2019, they have 2.38 billion monthly active users, making it the first social network ever to do so (Facebook First Quarter Report, 04.2019). These impressive numbers were also mentioned by an entrepreneur in the focus group, emphasizing that "social media has created a global market, where you can reach the massive of consumers, at the fastest speed" (Focus group Person 2).

The function of social media in b2c marketing was discussed, with most participants agreed that social media blurred geographic lines, focused on the need to connect as social creatures of human, and targeted in identity relevant market niche. The below figure presents social media lenses from a marketer's point of view.
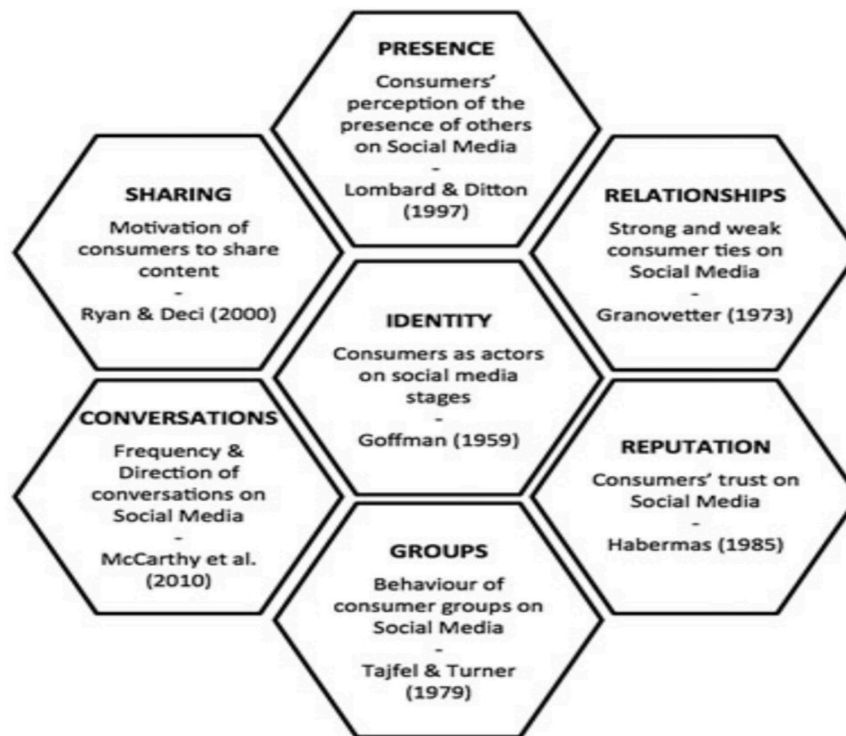
Picture 2: Social media lenses (Kietzman et al. 2011, 248)

As seen in the figure, these fundamental building blocks of social media are used to understand consumers' behaviors, and to create engagement between business-customers and business-community. "The honeycomb model suggests identity, presence, relationships, conversations, groups, reputations and sharing as key constructs for understanding social media marketing" (Kietzman et al. 2012, 110). For example, while YouTube focuses on sharing, Facebook, on the other hand, uses relationship as their core value and tool. Different social media platforms thus create different tools for marketers, depending on what type of product or service they provide, what marketing content they would like to deliver and what kind of feedback they expect to get back. Focus Group Person 1 talked about her own experience about managing the brand's reputation in social media. It was difficult, according to her, to measure effects of social media acts, while consumers 'online identity might not be their real ones. However, in order to maintain reputation, being present and actively participating in conversations within social media platforms was important. She said that the number of people liking their page in Facebook declined significantly if they did not post every day or organize some activities to promote interaction.

The focus group participants mentioned several examples of their own hand-on experiences with social media marketing while reaching out to their future customers. A MBA student (Focus group Person 3) told a story about a campaign he did to promote gender equality for minority women living in Finland. Within 24 hours, he got more than 3000 shares on Facebook, and received both positive and negative feedbacks, which were both valuable. The cost of the campaign was minimum, but the result was desirable. Comparing with a similar campaign he did in the past while at school, the power of networking and technology in social media was impressively improved.

Not only does social media provide an effective platform for marketing, it also changed the way in which business works. The Marketing and Sale manager admitted in the discussion that 15 years ago, she did not take social media as a relevant marketing tool, but otherwise a supplementary advertisement channel, because most of her clients are mid-aged and she supposed were not interested in social networking. However, she said she witnessed a change in the way companies in Finland conduct business, and part of the change was due to social media. According to her, "mass marketing has given way for targeted group marketing", and that "niche marketing is generating more benefit" (Focus group Person 1). The niche market is especially effective because social media platforms like Facebook or YouTube contain data of billions of people with details about their interests, educations, political views, career and also their expectations expressed in their daily interactions and so on. Moreover, small businesses are curving out a new market share exclusively on social media. Many startups only have a small office at home, and most of their interaction and trading were made in their Facebook page or Etsy (a website in which small business mostly sell their hand made products, ranging from embroidery backpacks to customized jewelry) or their own website. SmallBizTrend estimated in their article written by Guta on Novermber 2018 that 79% of the sellers on the site are micro businesses with a single person, with 97% of them running their shops from their home (Guta M, SmallBizTrend, 25.11.2018). In April 2019, Facebook published a report stating that thousands of small companies participating in their Marketplace, a special platform for buying and selling in Facebook, already doubled or tripled their benefit within one year. For example, SucculentsBox.com was a family-run company in the US. They started in 2016 to sell succulents and provide a monthly subscription with little succulent plans automatically being sent to the subscribers. Selling mostly via Facebook Marketplace, they successfully generated 2,5 million US dollars revenues in 10 months (Succulentsbox,

10.2019). The business provider also emphasized on the importance of new trading platforms on social media, saying that "they practically boost up sale for startups who are not able to lease an office" (Focus Group Person 4).

More importantly, with almost 20 years along the line, social media, with its global popularity and expansion, already changed many social values and created a generation who grew up with it. To adapt to this new generation, social media marketing is an apparent choice that no marketer can discard. While approving this phenomenon, many in the discussion complained about the shortcomings of social media, namely the difficulty in targeting correct audiences and measuring the marketing plan, when many users have fake or multiple accounts. At the same time, a mid-aged entrepreneur said he felt "overwhelmed by the number of wrong targeted-ads, which makes us questioned the effective of Facebook's new algorithm" (Focus group Person 5). From users' standpoint, all participants expressed a concern about not being able to control to what extent social media can use their personal data and that "the legal agreements that users need to accept before using social media are too complicated for the general public to understand". They concluded that no matter how social media will be changing, business will always find a way to adapt, but the need to reduce the downsides of social media marketing is not to be ignored and requires technological and ethical efforts.

4.2   Risks of social media b2c marketing

Social media marketing has potential risk, because online crime is not a new perception. However, it has become a hot topic in general public during the last two years, frequently appearing in big and small news outlet. When discussing about risks, it differs between people from different standpoints.

4.2.1   Business standpoint

The focus group discussion went through several major themes of social media marketing. One of them was risks and negative impacts of social media marketing towards customers/clients and businesses. This particular aspect received a huge concentration and contribution from all participants, probably because all of participants were on both sizes (customers - business) and had hand-on experiences.

While social media has expanded profoundly over the last few years, it has both positive and negative impacts on social and business life. More businesses bloomed with social media marketing support. As a student participant stated, "new markets were created and gained market shares from conventional businesses" (Focus Group Person 6). For example, Facebook marketplace has seen successful stories of many small startups, making them a real threat to traditional small businesses. As noted from another member of the discussion: "Social media marketing is a trend that no one can stay behind, and every business needs to adapt to follow this trend". The world has witnessed big companies, namely ToyRUs (U.S.A), Anttila (Finland), etc., went bankruptcy when they could not catch up with the digital age and online trading. While ToyRUs succumbed to its debt burden after the 2005 US$ 6.6 billion leveraged buyout and the competition of online toy distributors, leading to the biggest bankruptcy of a U.S retailer in the last 15 years (Rucinski T, Reuters, 14.03.2018) and Anttila, a department store chains in Finland experienced similar outcome. After struggling with operating losses, Anttila filed for bankruptcy no more than roughly a year after it was acquired by 4K Invest, a private equity firm based in Germany (Teivainen A., Helsinki Times, 20.07.2016). *While big firms go down*, one entrepreneur invited to the group discussion thought that was a good impact, because it opened up new chances for small business (Focus Group Person 2). Meanwhile, a marketing and sale manager (Focus Group Person 1) from a big company disagreed, arguing that it was difficult to measure and monitor small business based their entire business in a social media platform. It was clear to see that, risks of social media b2c marketing were different looking from 2 standpoints. However, all group members agreed that social media indeed created more market value and market place for global trading, and that it was a very convenient, though not easy to measure, marketing platform.

4.2.2   Customers' standpoint

There were two risks associating with social media marketing being discussed. First, people *became addicted to social media is a real epidemic*. This has produced a generation who love talking via chat icons but avoid face-to-face situations. Depression, social isolation, social skill and language impairment were just a few of their problems. One business student told a story about young people "who need social media interaction and smartphone applications just like they need the air to breath, and will

feel naked, bare and exposed if they do not have any smart devices when left among others" (Focus Group Person 6). He also strongly advised the problem to be fixed with social attitude and technological advances. An IT freelancer added that "social media needs to step up to solve this" (Focus Group Person 7). Losing balance between real and online life would indeed create a huge setback for human nature, resulting in people being unable to solve real life problems.

Secondly, and most importantly, and also mostly discussed about was the risk of identity and personal information being leaked and misused. There has been "growing concerns about privacy and information leak in Google + and Facebook in the past couple of years, leading to a number of people deleted their Facebook account as a way to demonstrate their disapproval" (Focus Group Person 2). Another entrepreneur, from his IT field, confirmed with a few examples, that "technological mishaps and data thief actually are not new phenomenon, and are not exclusively to social media" (Focus Group Person 5). When people are more aware of social media risks, there has been a trend of "social media cleanse", when people shut down or limit their social media usage, which affect social media marketing. There might be a need of new social media platforms, which are "organic" where people would even pay for it and control how their data is used, as well as received valuable contents and not only weakly controlled feeds. These ideas were suggested by several different participants, considering that all of them work in marketing as the major job, or at least part of their job.

4.3   Business to community

Business to Community as replacement for Business to Customers/Clients has been an interesting concept being discussed by all participants. This isn't a new idea. Ever since social media was born and gradually became a social phenomenon, it has already been suggested that marketers should focus more on the interaction/relationship between companies and customers, other than on products and services. In the new age of social media, "people are center of any business and communication activity… because people want participation, not propaganda" (Scott 2008, 22). The New Rules of Marketing and PR, according to Scott, suggest organizations for a new way of doing business, creating and building online relationships with their customers and with the whole community. Furthermore, these rules open up a new way of thinking in which customer values and

an exchange understanding are truly appreciated. Every business has information that can contribute to the education of the marketplace, and this contribution to the community has positive effect on both corporate and society level. Within the discussion, there was an example told by a marketing manager, that she herself received a lot of free online training courses from big corporations or organizations, which helped her tremendously in developing her career. In turn, she had lots of plans for her company to give back to the society. Training and education, according to her, has been proved to have a long-term positive effect on both the society and on building a better marketplace for corporates to thrive on (Focus Group Person 1).

Without a doubt, creating a positive relationship with community is indeed a sustainable development strategy in social media marketing. A participant empathized that "creating a safe and better societal, economic and environmental place is not only for this year or next 5 year's benefit target, but for also for future generations" (Focus Group Person 7). It was agreed between everyone that, even though it was difficult, it was corporates' responsibility to hold a balance between public interest and organizational benefits, between protecting the environment and using the natural resources of the industry, between selling products and caring for the community. The concept of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) was mentioned by Focus Group Person 4, and people expressed their expectation that social media marketers would have measurements to monitor and ensure their adherence to law, ethical standards, and international norms. In the concept of CSR, an organization in the industry should embrace responsibility for the impact of their activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders and all other members of the public sphere. Within the topic of the discussion, CSR is also taking better risk control, protecting users' identity and data. Social media platforms should also be proactive in filter their contents, and help in contribute valuable, educational content to their users. Within this "peoplenomics" (Solis 2008a, 12), a participant stated, "relationship with your customers, or potential customers, is in a long-term more important than fast trading number", and that "we indeed need to define B2C as Business to Community, because without a fruitful environment, that is our surrounding society, the future of social media marketing isn't promised" (Focus Group person 3). Following the negative news about social media companies and third parties abusing online marketing rules, it is about time to rebuild the trust with community. In the future, to reduce the risk, there is

a need to have more transparency in social media algorithm, which requires both technological and ethical efforts.

4.4 Wild cards in store

What if the world turns upside down? During the discussion, several destructive possibilities were mentioned, namely worldwide stock market crash, political extreme tension/war, terrorism, natural catastrophes, etc. These images are "Wild Cards" in futures studies, which is very challenging and difficult scenario thinking. "A wild card is a description of an occurrence that is assumed to be improbable, but which would have large and immediate consequences for organizational stakeholders if it were to take place. Usually such events are serious, destructive, catastrophic or anomalous and essentially not predictable" (Mendonca et al. 2002, 23). While the probability of a wild card is low, the impact of it is generally very high and damaging. Focus group person 1 mentioned the 2008's stock market crash in the US, leading to the banking crisis and financial and social instability in a global scale. She also mentioned that many of her then business plans were wasted. Focus group person 5 also agreed, saying that there were also some chances when extremes events happened. Other members talked about climate changes, though gradually, but might bring sudden natural disasters, for example, tsunami, forest fire. What would a wild card for social marketing be? As with any other social phenomenon, when there is any negative damaging event, social media marketing would have a huge impact.

When the discussion was held in 2019, the world was more peaceful than it is now in 2020. It is likely that no one among the participants thought a Wild Card was already on their way, dropping to the world like a bomb: Covid19 epidemic. It started in China then spread like wildfire all over the continents. Dead toll rises every day and within half a year, it killed more than 500.000 people, many of them were old with medical background, but it also killed young and healthy people (Rahim Z., CNN, 29.06.2020). More than just a disease that kills, Covid19, unprecedentedly closed borders of nations throughout the world. Schools and offices closed, many cities were deserted for the first time after the World War II, realized how precious it was the freedom to move and travel. Many things modern people took for granted were taken away with this epidemic. The billion-dollar airline industry saw lines and lines of aircrafts grounded.

Tourism is frozen around the world, leaving millions of people out of jobs, many out of food as well in the poorer parts of the earth. Entertainment industry had the same fate, and in many zoos, once lively and full of people, they had to feed the small animals to the bigger ones, in desperation (BBC News, 14.04.2020). World economy is destroyed, and the end still hasn't been near yet. International conflicts, social and political disintegration, instability in all aspect of life, we name it. This is a Wild Card, so extreme, so damaging, so unimaginable, came to life. It is estimated that the world would not recover for a long time to come. Many things would never be the same, even after this epidemic has passed. Some bonds are already broken between alliances and people blaming each other for not committing to social distancing. It is a whole new way of life no matter if it is social, private, family or work life.

Where does social media stand in this Wild Card situation? With social distancing becoming a new normalcy, social media indeed would have a chance to gain back their trust and popularity, after several mistrust incidents in the past. During the epidemic, Facebook launched the 'Business Resource Hub' to support those being affected by the pandemic. The free-to-access hub includes a 'resilience toolkit', which has information about preventing business disruptions, and a 'quick action guide' to help coordinate response activities. Facebook has also provided businesses with a number of free templates to help them communicate key messages related to Covid-19 responses, as well as simple messages of gratitude. Examples of templates include 'yes, we're still taking orders' and 'we wouldn't be here without you'." (Gilliland N., EConsultancy 22.05.2020). During the discussion in 2019, Focus Group Person 2 indeed mentioned about a possibility that social media might gain back their users' presence if some unexpected environmental change would make moving between locations more difficult. With the decline of world economy, it is not easy to expect other business areas to develop, if it is not essential production and service industry. However, in the next 1-2 year, when the world already have vaccination to deal with Coronavirus, the utmost important goal would be lifting up the economy. It would be the time for online marketing to work to the full potential. Would social media benefit from that opportunity? With the current trend, that is a very possible future. I wholeheartedly agree with one of the participant, Focus Group number 3, when he said that social media "gives people the feeling of being connected, it eliminates physical and time-zone distance. It will always be an important part of our life". I also think that, if there is something replacing Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, it will also be "social", maybe

with different technology, but it would still help people to build up and maintain relationships, and give them a sense of belonging to the social life.

5 CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS: IMAGES OF THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

In this section, I will present four images of the futures, developed from descriptions, analyzations, scientific predictions, personal imaginations, ideas and generalization from the central themes. The concept about images of the future was introduced during the focus group discussion in a simple way. The participants answered to the questions: "There would be different possibilities of the futures, can you image what they would be? Can you describe how the world would be, and how social media marketing would be in those images?" As agreed by all focus group participants, the futures of social media marketing would fall into 4 categories: the "as good as it gets" one, the negative one, the ideal one, and an unknown future when a wild card appears. These also to some degree reflect Jim Dator's Four Images of the Futures that was described in previous part, which was also my starting point when I brainstorm for my research.

When discussing about the importance of social media in b2c marketing, Focus Group Person 6 mentioned: "As we look at the development of social media, it is clear that there is a very high chance it will continue to dominate in marketing strategy". However, how significant would that domination be, there are more than one answer. In the previous section, I have analyzed different central themes that were generalized and thoroughly discussed. Next, I will use CLA method to break down concepts, ideas, judgments and justifications collected from those themes to create four images of the futures. These images follow four possible futures that the data went through during the discussion. Each image provides insights and values that were collected from the research material. Those values come from the first actual data analysis (the central theme part presentation). Those values are not my own.

In order to build up these images, Causal Layer Analysis methodology was chosen. CLA, as a method, "its utility is not in predicting the future but in creating transformative spaces for the creations of alternative futures" (Inayatullah 2009, 17). The purpose of my research while using this methodology is to build up different images of possible futures from multiple points of views and deep analysis drawn up from the focus group discussion. I'd like to study this social media marketing phenomenon from the four layers of CLA, which was developed by Inayatullah: the surface meaning (litany), driving forces (social causes), general meaning (worldview/discourse) and the deepest metaphor (Inayatullah 2004, 8). According to

Inayatullah, CLA is to begin with "situated in critical futures research to disturb present power relations through challenging our categories and evoking other places or scenarios of the future, and to allow spaces of reality to loosen" (Inayatullah 2009, 2-5). From here, language has more power to open up ideas, to study history and estimate current events, as well as connect structural elements of social phenomena. Considering the nature of focus group discussion, CLA helps to fulfill the lack of quantitative empirical data, but offers a deeper view into the object of the research, to study the phenomenon from the upper to underneath layers, or "brings in these different epistemological positions but sorts them out at different levels" (Inayatullah 2009, 5).

It was agreed during the discussion that, as part of a social and business phenomenon, B2C marketing via social media would have either a promising future or a dooming future, or it would be transformed into something else, which might be completely or only partly different.

Two of the participants foresaw a future in which social media would be customized to work more effectively for business, while providing a better-personalized experience for users/clients. On the other hand, another participant seemed doubtful, explaining about anti-tech and anti-social media trends he already witnessed around the world, suggesting that social media might lose its popularity in the future. However, most of the group members shared a common thinking that social media might change, technological wise, and social media marketing might transform, as a social movement, to achieve a better connection between business and community (in general) and their customers (in particular). Their nonverbal expression, the reluctance or enthusiasm also contributed to the meaning of their speeches. With CLA, all the above-mentioned ideas and discussions are contextualized and categorized into different images of the futures. These images are similar ideas combined into a specific future state. It is not a statistic structure building on facts and numbers, but a mental structure which is composed of understanding on the present and the past, knowledge and interpretations, real life experiences, cultural orientation, world view concepts, etc. The evaluation of those images of the future would affect decision-making process in different levels, therefore subjective presenting of individual's needs to be viewed from multiple objective perspectives, taking into consideration each participant's motivating and activating factors. Those factors decide each person's view about the past, present and thus the future image of the phenomenon. Within the possible futures presented, there was a slight dispute about what would be "desirable future", because it would be difficult to

find a common goal while being in different standpoint. For example, community benefits don't always equal business's interests. However, over the discussion, all members agreed to disagreed and came up with a common "desirable future", which would be analyzed in later part of this thesis. Among the possible futures some present the best futures for a specific actor, and they are called desirable futures. There would be no specific comparison between the possibilities of different images of future in my research. All images, except for the most desirable one, are probable futures, built from examining multiple possibilities. While sharing some similarity, my four images of the future will be different from Jim Dator's Four Futures. Details are discussions in each section for each image.

5.1   Social media to develop into a personalized fundamental online marketing platform

The first image of the future is a bright one, or if we think about Jim Dator's Four Future, it is the *continuation* one. In this future, social media marketing continues to develop and expand its impact in all aspects of life. It is also personalized to meet each and every user's tastes, thanks to new-sophisticated algorithms. Four layers of this image are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Image of the future 1 (advancement of social media marketing as it is personalized to individual taste)

Litany	Social/systematic cause	Worldview discourse	Metaphor/myth
Social media marketing continues to expand in the future, taking a big part in social and business life. Content is personalized to meet individual need.	Globalization and technological advancement encourages people to work and build up relationship despite time difference and space distance. The nature of human to connect as a social animal is also a driving force.	Globalism and individualism Technological dependency	Self-identity and subconscious need to belong of human.

In this image of the future, it was believed by the whole focus group that B2C marketing would become a fundamental part of everyday life. That is, the presence on social media of companies and organizations would not cease but increase instead. It would be seen easily from the percentage of social media marketing contributing in the budget and benefit of each corporation. The content and the functions of social media would be personalized to meet each customer's desire. This decreases irritation from unwanted marketing promotions and gives Internet users better experiences with the brands. This is the *litany* level, where we see how the phenomenon would look like in the next 20 years. This is a factual basis, because it was seen from the past how the trend was. During the last 10 years, with the development of technology (from 3G to 5G) and personal handheld electronic items (from 3G mobile phone to 5G tablet with retractable keyboard), people have been provided with unlimited data, at unlimited time, from anywhere in the world. It is only natural for people to choose to be online whenever they would like to be. Social media let people be present without having to physically do so. This is the *social cause*, *the systemic development layer*. When looking at this image of the future from CLA's vertical levels, it was easy to see that "the nature of us is to making social connection, and globalization needs technology to facilitate those connecting relationships. It is only a causal effect that social media becomes so dominant in our everyday life" (Focus Group Person 4). While one participant emphasized the importance of technology, she said social media marketing always had the driving forces in term of on-going development in technological, social and economic life (Focus Group Person 1).

It was also a common ground that participants agreed on when they discussed about the underlying meaning of this future. Globalism has been silently sweeping throughout the globe, leaving people unconsciously having a desire and hope for a life and career with no boundaries. At the same time, people "become much more comfortable with technology and the two worlds collide" (Hallam 2013, 17). People depend on social media in particular and in technology in general to keep up with their globally connected lives. They start to take care of their presence on online platform along with their offline characters. This is where we find the third layer of meaning, the *worldview/discourse*. An entrepreneur, the Focus Group Person 2, gave an example of how his point of view about online shopping had changed. He said that ever since Facebook opened their Market place, he spent less time on the website than on Facebook, and the number of products he sold on Facebook was more than expected.

Many buyers lived oversea, but Facebook made them feel more connected and did not mind paying for some extra shipping fee. Social media, as he said, was a shining portrait of globalism, and this trend, he believed, would continue.

What would explain the reason why people would love to connect via social media, and why social media marketing would become "personalized"? Hallam (2013, 51) discussed in his book "The social media manifesto" about how people were social animal, and that they would like to have attention, as well as being connected, and at the same time to have their personal space. It was the *myth layer*, the deepest meaning of this phenomenon in this image of the future. When business gives their customer or prospect customer a meaningful message, focuses on integration and cultural protection, it builds up the underlying connection between them. It breaks down the visible walls of physical territorial boundaries, and individual walls of language, social, political, cultural and differences in personal opinions. This is when personalized marketing strategy produced via social media platforms would plausibly be an imaginable future.

5.2   Responsible social media marketing and added values for the community and society (desirable future)

The second image of the future presents an ideal one, a desirable future. While it has some characteristic of Jim Dator's Limit and Discipline Future, in a way that problems in this world are generally controlled, it has a more potential for development. In this future, both business and community gain something through social media marketing, in a win-win strategy. According to Focus Group Person 2, she experienced "the weight of social responsibility on business", and if this responsibility is to be ignored, there would be negative lash back from consumers, hindering corporate's development and ruining their reputation. Corporate social responsibility is nowadays no longer a task for the Public Relations Department. It has developed "from being an exercise in PRs to an absolute necessity for almost any business…due to business having to demonstrate that they have a positive role in the society aside from providing jobs and paying taxes" (Hallam 2013, 94).

Table 2: Image of the future 2 (social media to provide more than marketing purpose, to act as a channel for companies to accomplish their corporate social responsibility)

Litany	Social/systematic cause	Worldview discourse	Metaphor/myth
Social media marketing focus more on creating social and educational values, aside from financial benefits. Corporate responsibility is emphasized in marketing. Risks of social media are reduced and controlled.	Social awareness being increased over the work of non profit organization, asking for better management and responsibility from corporates	Multipolarity, Levelling after the peak of globalization, conflicts and negative impacts of globalism. Evolution of new world order (economical and social wise)	Humanity strikes for real human values, after experiencing negative impact of globalization (the demand to "social protection" over human rights, social and cultural rights)

In a desirable future, social media should facilitate the connection between brands and community, because the longer people live in a technologically connected world, the more powerful they, as customers, become in influencing brands' and organizations' businesses. "Businesses are being forced to become much more open, transparent and social" (Hallam 2013, 44). In a blink of an eye, news from one part of the world could reach many other parts. The more connected people are in the future, which is not hard to predict with 5G, new multimedia and mobile technology being introduced frequently yearly, the more important they are to any business. According to Hallam (2013, 44), the "walls" of business no longer exist; information, insights, opinions, judgments and compliments are being shared within people, being a consumers or employees, being current customers or future ones. Businesses while doing their marketing strategies, find it difficult to lie to the public and to ignore their corporate social responsibility. Ideally, they should actively search for, and work for the community's benefits. Human become the core value of businesses (Solis 2009, 45). Creating more added values while making a real connection with their customers and community might include "providing educational contents, facilitating knowledge-exchange, being open about company's short comings to build up trust" (Focus Group Person 4). Moreover, the risks of social media marketing, which was mentioned in the central theme section, for example,

addiction to social media and the risk of personal data leaks and misuses should also be reduced. While technology isn't an obstacle, corporate responsibility is the answer to solve those risks. This is the ***litany level*** of this image of the future.

In the ***social level***, there are already signals of social awareness being raised throughout the world. Facebook being investigated and fined 5 billions US dollars (Nunez M., Forbes 24.07.2019) was a wake up call for the Internet users to protect their online data, as well as for social media marketers to have a better handling of customers' data. As we have moved a long way into the globalization process, along with opportunities, companies face more and more competitions. Customers' demand for added values, and corporate social responsibility becomes a real task no one would overlook. It would be no longer enough for companies to sell good services or products. They need to take into consideration the impact of their production on the environment, society life, humanity, animal rights and so on. While discussing about this topic, several examples were listed by focus group members. Person 2 told stories about many demonstrations by animal activists during 2000-2014 to ask for a ban in using real furs in high-end fashion and animal testing in cosmetics industry. Thanks to PETA and Green Peace, general public's awareness about animal rights was significantly increased over the time. People now take a closer look at not only the products, but also at the company's morality and production process. "It is a challenge for companies, now that they have to show how productive and constructive their business is towards society" (Focus Group person 2). In the ***worldview discourse level***, several focus group members mentioned that the leveling after the peak of globalization, conflicts and negative impacts of globalism would make people more aware of real values of life. Considering the conflict and separation between the biggest economies (China versus the USA, the USA versus Russia, UK versus EU), evolution of new world order (economical and social wise) is expected. Deep down under this worldview discourse reason, ***myth layer*** actually lies in human's natural protective instinct. Focus Group Person 2 said: "In a preferable future, people will fight for their humanity values, they will have the social awareness to protect their social and cultural rights". They would want to get rid of the negative impact of globalization, namely the extension of income inequality, environmental damages, loss of minority heritage, etc. The change in their thinking, they being aware about the world and they wanting to have a better world are reasons for all the good things that would come in this image of the future, including a change-for-better future social media marketing. When comparing to Jim Dator's Four Future,

this preferable future has the potential to develop to a robust and blooming society, while his Discipline future continues on an almost flat line, growing steadily.

5.3   Social media marketing being abandoned (dooming future)

Would there be a very dark future lying ahead for social media in the next 20 years? As stated in the background section, there have been several anti-social media waves happening around the world. Millions of Facebook users deleted their accounts to demonstrate their disappointment and disapproval over Facebook's full-of-flaw data policy. In a dark future, the number might be so much higher. On a *litany level*, social media marketing might lose their power and popularity altogether. All participants in my focus group had more or less bad experiences about social media platforms and third-party applications tricking people into giving out their personal data amid playing games, doing free tests and reading educational contents.

Social media, as powerful as it is, has given human an illusion that their interaction and sharing over these platforms are free and decentralizing. There is a freedom of speech, and there is an abundance of Internet speed for them to express themselves. Most of normal Internet users thus let off their guard, and hardly read thoroughly any "Terms and Conditions" before clicking. As per Focus Group Person 4 stated: "The future might be bad, if no risk enhancement made with real intent to protect users". Would social media then be replaced by something else? Technology advancement within the next 2 decades might create a different media that is safer and more convenient. Would Facebook lose their shining light in the same way Yahoo did? Yahoo was extremely popular in late 1990s and early 2000s, but then it slowly declined and had to watch its own dying glory due to many operational and strategic problems (Thomas D., BBC News, 07.01.2016). It was predicted by some participants that, Facebook had been following suit in decreasing their popularity. They envisioned during the discussion about some other form of media, with better policy and technology, providing unprecedented multimedia experience, producing high value contents. In this *litany i*mage of the future, social media as we know it no longer exists.

Table 3: Image of the future 3 (Social media being abandoned - dooming future)

Litany	Social/systematic cause	Worldview discourse	Metaphor/myth
The dark future. Social media being abandoned or replaced by another type of media, depending on then available technology	The risks of social media could not be controlled: - Personal data on online platforms are not well protected or being traded back and forth. - Social media addiction, especially in young generation, eliminating their real life social skills	Economic and social crisis, political and religious conflicts leaving people vulnerable and strike for humanity. Backlash impact of digital world (people crave for real interactive and wish to learn social skills)	People have more self-awareness and have instinct to protect themselves, as well as their human connection

As shown in the table above, there are clear *social/systematic layer* causes. People are aware about their rights being abused, their personal data being legally yet unethically shared and manipulated. Over a decade immersing in an always-connected society, Facebook and Google's data leaking scandals also act like a wake up call for "young people, old people, many people who have been gradually withdrawing into their own physical space and losing their real life social skills" (Focus Group Person 2). One person in the group admitted that he found it very hard not to constantly checking this multiple social media sites that it took away his inner peace. He also said that a lot of his friends went back to a basic phone without any Wifi or 4G services. There are even rehab centers to help people with social media addition. A quick search on Google shows hundreds of such centers in different countries.

If we look at this alternative future from a *worldview discourse*, there are deeper meanings lying in both micro and macro levels. At a macro level, there has been an increase in economic, political, social and religious, race, ethnic and class, which lead human being to a more intense yet vulnerable state. They then become more self-conscious and self-protective. This is human nature's instinct. It would be more difficult for them to trust in someone they do not know well, thus the reluctance and resistance to social media connection.

On the other hand, from a micro level point of view, as the ***myth layer*** people are hit hard by a backlash of digital world, they feel more isolated and lonelier, and they crave real human contacts after long hours texting and Internet surfing. At some point in the future of 20 years, people would start to question about the authenticity of one another's identity, of corporate's reputation. They would understandably suspect the nature of social media, if politicians or big corporation, in order to control citizen's life, and to achieve financial benefit, manipulated them. Social media spreads news, trends, and even knowledge, if they were designed to drive public opinions, which would be a disaster to human rights. In fact, social media sharing unsuitable or damaging contents would be a problem, providing that they also have in their hands their users' personal data. In a dooming world, this would already have happened, and thus might become one of the reasons why people turn their back to social media and abandon social media marketing. B2C, be it Business to Customers or Business to Community, would die off as a result. This image of the future is actually very close to the collapse/decline future of Jim Dator. In this collapse future, he emphasizes that the decline might be a phase of life cycle growth, that is, it would be completely replaced by something else, or return in the future.

5.4   When the world turns upside down (Wild Card)

The last image of the future that I created using data collected during the focus group discussion is the one containing Wild Card(s). As presented above in the theory section, Wild Card is very extreme, damaging events, which might destroy human life physically, socially, and economically. Although the world as a whole might suffer from a Wild Card event, social media marketing might have very different outcomes in such case.

Table 4: When the world turns upside down (Wild Card)

Litany	Social/systematic cause	Worldview discourse	Metaphor/ myth
Life changing events. World economic crisis and/or humanitarian crisis. Online marketing either has a booming or a dooming future, depending on the specific circumstances of the crisis	- Overpopulation and over-use of natural resources cause political, religious and social conflicts - Climate change, pollution, environmental problems - Unavoidable natural disasters	People are vulnerable living creatures. Their lives are under multiple threats, be it from the nature (earth or outer space), or from their own complicated advanced yet problematic civilization. History has proved that any nations and civilization has declining periods.	Nature's randomness

Although there was no recent Wild Card happened at the time of the discussion, the group did create an image of the future, in which the world is destroyed. It would either be military war, leading by economic and political conflicts, or natural disaster, ignited by the earth over populated and exploited. On the surface, or *litany level* it is a dooming picture, with world economy crashing down, leading to poverty in many parts of the world, and eventually followed by humanitarian crisis. Online marketing would either jump up skyrocketing in sale, or decline significantly, depending on the specific circumstances of the crisis. We now have Covid19 as a real-life example, where companies like Amazon, Pharmacies and Food delivery find opportunity to grow in this very difficult time. Other than essential groceries and household products, other services and production companies all face lost and failure. Luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, Channel, etc. had to stop their luxurious fragrant lines and used the factory to produce hand sanitizer (BBC News, 16.03.2020). Would this be a good chance for social media marketing? Yes and no, it again depends on the business itself, but in general, social media still is needed to connect people, especially in special time like in this epidemic. Below the litany level, there would be underlying already-existing social, economic and political problems (*social level*). Overpopulation, environmental pollution, religious conflicts are painful issues that are always there, poking into our civilization, reminding

us that sooner or later there would be more problematic situations. The "Black Live Matter" trend in the US in June-July 2020, followed by instability in social order and damages for citizens and businesses, is an example of that. NewYork Times on July 2020 even demonstrated it as the "largest movement in the US history" (Buchana, Bui and Patel for NewYorkTimes, 03.07.2020).

In a *worldview discourse*, in time of a huge disaster on a global scale, it is easy to see that people are vulnerable living creatures. No matter how intelligent our modern world is, we are still not susceptible to diseases and death. We are still under multiple threats, be it from the nature (earth or outer space), or from their own complicated advanced yet problematic civilization. History has proved that any nations and civilization has declining periods. The future might see the disintegration of nations, alliances and even an elimination of human life altogether. Wild Card, the name in itself predicts the scarcity and unlikely nature of it. It is not something we would see in every 10-20 years, but once it happens, the damages are huge, no matter how well prepared we would be. This is the *myth level*. Wild Cards are bound to happen, in all of its randomness, no matter what we do. While nature itself has its own course, human nature is to fight back again those extreme situations. However, sometimes, for example with this Coronavirus, though the chance for such virus to transmit to human and develop is always incredibly small, it did happen. Incredibility happens and that's the randomness of nature, which we would not control. On the positive note, with human's current civilization, even with natural disaster like Covid19 epidemic, we would find medicine, vaccination and some solution to save our own life. It is impossible to predict that there would or would not be another Wild Card in the next 20 years, but if something like that happens again, it surely will be the dark future for each and every business. Personally I believe that, no matter how difficult life would become, if our civilization were still protected, if we still have technology, the future of social media would still be in good shape. This image of the future, because it might have different outcomes for the subject of this project (social media marketing), depending on multiple aspects of life, differs from Jim Dator's Transformative Future. Dator's future opens opportunity for extraordinary technology, facilitated by the openness of social movements, and develops into a wealthy, productive and sophisticated society. In this image of mine, social media marketing, while might grow up to the one of the most important marketing channel, might also die young with Wild Card's damages.

6   CONCLUSIONS

My thesis's topic was chosen because of my very own interest in social media. I find its development fascinating, given the fact that I had work experiences in traditional media in the past. I am also interested in the "immigration" of older generation into social media business life. Unlike "***digital natives***", who were born in digital age, between 1990 to current time, people older than that are ***"digital immigrants"*** (Prensky 2001, 26). They are not native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games, the Internet and social media, but they are actively using social media for work. I have observed the differences in perception and attitudes towards social media between those two groups of people within my focus group participants. They also have slightly different point of views about the future of social media marketing. For example, the only two "digital natives" in the group were especially positive about the future, and were less offended by the fact that social media had risks of privacy and data leaking. It does not mean that younger generation easily accepts the bad side of social media, but they seem to be more positive in finding a possible solution. Within building the images of the future, it was agreed that the future could not be predicted, but alternative futures could be forecasted and prepared for.

Writing this research, I aimed to study more about social media marketing, and to answer the research questions. From the data I collected, the result was motivational to me. To conclude, I would like to contribute to the understanding of social media marketing B2C, and to future studies. I share the same idea with Dator that the main task of future studies is to "identify and examine the major alternatives futures that exist at any given time and place" (Dator 2019, 6). I also think that future thinking, as well as basic knowledge of future studies should be provided to everyone, to facilitate individuals and groups in formulating, implementing, and re-envisioning their preferred future. Moreover, we should have future consciousness, and to train our skills to be able to deal with Wild Cards events. Studying past trends might provide paths to find ways into the futures, and let us work towards a preferable tomorrow for the world.

Covid19 is a damaging extreme event, that we have been dealing it together as humanity. During an online international conference in June 2020, organized by Finland Future Research Center, Finland Futures Academy and Finnish National Education Academy, Olli-Pekka Heinonen, a Finnish communication expert and politician said: "Never in the last 30 years, the international cooperation is as strong as during the

Covid19 times"(Heinonen 11.06.2020). He also said that this special time "was like an X-ray to magnify the goods and the bads", posing as a threat to globalism as a movement. This is a chance for futurist and marketers to learn new skills. During the above-mentioned reference, the most important aspect was to find the future skills to adapt to an upside-down world. We need to respect nature, to understand that it has random patterns, and to learn to trust each other in order to protect our civilization. No matter how evolutionary media and other technological devices would be in the future, it should protect the core humanity values, like press freedom, human rights, equality, solidarity and peace.

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Focus group discussion participants:

- Marketing and Sale manager (Focus group Person 1).

- Entrepreneur (Focus group Person 2)

- MBA Student (Focus group Person 3)

- Business provider (Focus group Person 4)

- Mid-age entrepreneur (Focus group Person 5)

- Business student (Focus group Person 6)

- IT freelancer (Focus group Person 7)

APPENDIX 1: INVITATION TO THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

My name is Le Vu. I am a student from the Master's Degree programme in Futures Studies (Turku School of Economics). I would like to invite you to a focus group discussion for a research I am conducting on my master's thesis. The discussion should last no longer than one and a half hour, and will be held in Turku School of Economics in May. Time and location are flexible. The place of the discussion can also be in HubTurku, should you prefer so. Please chose a suitable time from this link https://doodle.com/poll/qpsz74sirsxrkhsv . I will contact you directly later to inform you about exact time and location.

Purpose

The topic of the discussion is about the use of social media in b2c marketing. In the context of this thesis, b2c means business to customers (HubTurku as service provider and Hub community members as customers; Hub members as business providers and their customers/clients). It also means business to community (HubTurku as a contributor to business innovation and thus to general society).

My research will seek to answer the questions: What are the possible futures of b2c marketing via social media in small/medium companies in the next 20 years? What are the major factors and forces (technology advances, identity and online security awareness, globalism, etc) affecting these futures? What about social responsibility aspects? How does b2c marketing contribute to the community via social media?

I would like to listen and discuss with you about the pros and cons, possible futures of the phenomenon, what you plan and expect when using social media channels as a marketing tool. It is expected for all participants to gain some insight knowledge about the topic from different points of view, and the result will help my research to contribute to social marketing study.

The discussion

The focus group will involve about 8-10 members sharing their experiences together with me, the researcher. I will provide some background information about the topic before the meeting, as well as specific topics and questions during the discussion. A mobile phone will be used to make an audio recording. This recording would then be deleted once a transcript has been made.

Confidentiality

Please note that your name and any identifying information you share with us will remain confidential. Your responses will be summarized along with other responses and used collectively to help analyze the results. No names or identifying information will be used when compiling this information.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via my phone and email address provided below. I hope that you will be able to join us in this interesting research.

Thank you!

Best Regards,
Le Vu
Lephvu@utu.fi
044 3277 697

APPENDIX 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ON SOCIAL MEDIA B2C MARKETING

I am inviting you to my focus group discussion on social media marketing, within a future oriented project.

This is a futures studies research, that is, the starting point of theories and methodology lies in future thinking. You might not have studied futures studies yourself, but you probably already have futures thinking while doing planning for your own work. It is similar to strategic foresight, when you read signals, analyze current trends and social movements to see where the world might become in the coming years. The important thing is that, the *futures* are in plural forms, meaning there might be more than one possible future. Examining alternative futures is the purpose of futures studies, which I am inviting you to experience in this discussion.

 My research seeks answers for questions about possible changes and movement in social media B2C marketing, and from there develop understandings about different futures. As described above in the previous part, considering business requirements for customers/users' safety and privacy and innovation possible achievements, breakthrough changes are expected, from both technological and social trends.

> - What are the possible futures of B2C marketing via social media in small/medium companies in the next 20 years? How will social media change? How will the interaction between business and customers/clients/community change?
> - What are the risks of social media in the futures? How do those risks affect B2C marketing in the next 20 years?

These questions are made based on an assumption that there will be changes, probably prominent, within the time frame of 20 years. There is also an assumption that current trends (for example the emerging of social media marketing and the risk to data leaking in social media platforms) would continue and produce alternative outcomes. They would not magically disappear or easily be solved, and there would be a long development from the present into different possible futures. In order to answer these questions, many smaller questions-answers would be accumulated. The research objectives would be looked at from multiple angles and points of view, and from there,

be thoroughly discussed, analyzed and generalized. In hope of finding the answers for several possible futures of social media marketing, I created a research plan based on those above questions, and then studied the result focusing on the main issues proposed in them.

APPENDIX 3: LIST OF BRAINSTORMING QUESTIONS:

1. Social media marketing experience
   - How long have you been using social media for work/personal life? What are your general thoughts about social media?
   - Can you tell us an experience with social media marketing as a customer? As a business provider?
   - How much have social media marketing has been changing since the first days you started using it? Do you think the change is prominent?
   - Can you compare your experience with social media as a marketing channel versus other traditional marketing channels?
   - What is your feeling towards social media? Why do you think there are so many people have been using it?

2. B2C marketing

   - Do you work with B2C marketing? What do you think about the connection between businesses and customers via social media? Do you have any experience, impressions, stories to tell?
   - C in my thesis also means community, that is the connection between business and society as a whole, or the corporate social responsibility (CSR). What do you think about this? Do you have any experiences with CSR?

3. Bad sides

   - What are the negative sides of social media?
   - Do you have any personal experiences with the negative sides of social media?
   - Do you know about the risks accompanying social media? (Data leak, privacy intrusion)
   - What are your thoughts about these risks? What are the reasons for them? (Technological? Social? Political?)

- Do you think it is worth taking these risks? Can you talk about the pros and cons of social media marketing?
- Do you think these risks make producing marketing acts more difficult? Or is it beneficial for businesses (as in having personal data of customers)?

4. What will happen in the future?

- What do you think will happen to social media and social media marketing in the future? In the next 10 years? 20 years?
- Can you imagine alternative scenarios that it would turn out? (good, bad, in the middle, something extreme?)
- Can you elaborate on the driving signals that make a certain scenario come to life? What are most prominent social/technological/political/economical movements/trends we are having now? How much would they impact social media marketing in the coming year?
- How do you think we could control the risks and negative sides of social media marketing?
- Do you think CSR will be an important part of social media marketing in the future? Why (for both yes and no).
- What would be a "perfect future" for social media marketing?

5. Unexpected events

- What would happen to social media marketing if we have some extreme events (for example natural disasters, world economic crash, escalating political/religion wars). Would people turn their back to social media someday?
- What would replace social media, if possible? How important is social media to marketing in the future?
- Can you imagine a huge change in technology? Social life? Something extraordinary, something we would not believe that might come true?