

FACTORS INFLUENCING B2B BUSINESSES' COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT:

The study focuses on the problem of firms communicating via social networks in the B2B environment and also examines how companies behave on social networks. The goal of the study is to discuss the ways used by selected B2B businesses to make their customers use social networks. The inquiry is based on a case study of a B2B business active in the Czech Republic. To fulfil the goal, the authors researched personal characteristics of B2B customers, their psychological aspects and the corporate culture. This was made with help from the determination of five hypotheses. The study processed data from a survey focused on the company's customers sent to top managers in an electronic way. The data was assessed with help of non-parametric and correlation tests. The research showed that there was still big space for the improvement of the perception of social networks as a useful tool in B2B business. The majority of factors influencing the use of social networks in B2B were showing a low dependence due to a weak correlation. A strong dependence was shown only by the relation between the use of social networks in private and in a company.

KEY WORDS:

B2B, business-to-business marketing, customer behaviour, online marketing, social media

1 Introduction

The study researches the ways a business organisation uses social media to achieve its targets. The reviewed literature mostly discusses the use of social media and the influence of personal factors influencing the use of networks by the company's customers.

Communication is one of the most efficient strategies for building relations between a company and its customers. The ability to listen and correspondingly react to the needs of customers could positively impact the competitive ability of a company. Nowadays, social media can cover the communication between firms. Social

networks can be perceived as sets of hubs, or members of a social system, being somehow interconnected.¹ Online social networks are thus a special form of social capital, which can be used by individuals to improve their benefits and opportunities.² According to the authors Kaplan and Haenlein, it is possible to perceive social networks as a group of online applications based on the idea and technology of Web 2.0, which makes it possible to create and adjust online content generated by a user.³ This definition includes the key parts included in many definitions of social networks. They are online content, users and technology.⁴ In terms of B2C, social media are being widely researched and are an inseparable part of consumers' lives. Businesses are able to communicate with consumers in a way that is cheaper than ever before and this is made possible by social networks, which allow their users to quickly and cheaply create content enabling the development of business. Some B2B companies perceive social media as less important in the orientation of their relations with customers compared with other marketing activities and business models.⁵ Social networks have become very popular and increasingly attract the attention of businesspeople. They grow every day and people spend more and more time there. New kinds of interactions, human communication and also shopping have emerged thanks to social networks.⁶ The global use of social media, such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube*, has grown to such an extent that it can be described as pervasive. The above-mentioned social networks are subject to a growing interest in the B2B environment, because they provide a quicker and more personalised interaction between customers and suppliers and thus improve relations.⁷

2 Literature Review

Social media belong to the most important tools for gathering information in the B2B segment; however, only very little is known about the impact on sales output in B2B. In the digital era, customers can access all kinds of information and that is why they do not rely only on dealers, who would be the only ones to provide information on products, services and innovations. Nowadays, customers can quickly and easily search for information. They use many sources for this and communicate with dealers whenever and however they want.⁸ Social media include many ways for communication, providing opportunities for salesmen to join discussions on corporate matters.⁹ The authors Agresta and Bough mention that there is no simple pattern leading to a model of how to publish messages on social networks.¹⁰ This is caused by the different goals of particular companies, possibilities and experience of the companies and also the specific characteristics of particular business branches.

Studies published by Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides state that the process of the acceptance of social media is slower in B2B companies compared with B2C; however, the usefulness of social media in B2B has already been acknowledged by several scientists.¹¹ This is caused by the fact that social media technology

had become news in the past and a growing number of employees accept social media as part of their lives and their work procedures.¹² The authors Gregoire, Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan mention in their study three phases for the use of social media.¹³ This involves the search for new customers, the qualification of customers, and relationship management. The number of B2B businesses using social media for corporate purposes is growing; however, it is still necessary to improve processes.¹⁴ A 2009 study that took place among managers involved in the tech industry in the USA and Europe revealed that 55% of the managers were using social networks and 29% of them were also using them for business purposes.¹⁵ There was a big interest in social networks already at that time which is why many B2B businesses started to research and use them.¹⁶

Social media are also a source of information, emotional and social support creating value for a company.¹⁷ Customers are not passive recipients of marketing messages anymore and actively join the marketing process. They help create and improve the product, spread promotional messages and can, to a certain extent, determine the nature and context of marketing messages and contribute to the process of the creation of corporate values. This statement is confirmed in studies published by Weber and Hanna et al., who describe the change in the roles of salesman and consumer in the marketing process.¹⁸ In terms of B2B marketing, salesmen have to take into account many external parties and internal employees of their company.¹⁹ Professional social media services help in informal dialogue, which can currently contribute to a favourable cooperation environment or can make it easier for the process of the establishment of business contacts in the future.²⁰ Business relations also influence the emergence of different mutual dependencies at the formal business level (for instance, during the signature of a cooperation agreement) or informal level (for instance, the mutual personal relations of employees working for cooperating companies).²¹ In the business context, the expression of confidence is a presumption of a certain level of probability that a partner would behave responsibly.²² Some comprehensive definitions of confidence emphasise many related problems, such as determinants of confidence or effects of a trustworthy relationship.²³ An affective level of confidence seems to be the safest form of confidence. It is not based on irrational thinking, but rather on a personal perception, conviction about the good will and kindness of a partner.²⁴ These empirical results allowed us to assume the following research hypotheses:

1 KNOKE, D., YANG, S.: *Social Network Analysis*, 3rd Edition. Los Angeles : Sage Publications, 2020, p. 200.
 2 SCOTT, J.: *Social Network Analysis*, 4th Edition. Los Angeles : Sage Publications, 2017, p. 248.
 3 See: KAPLAN, A. M., HAENLEIN, M.: Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. In *Business Horizons*, 2010, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 59-68.
 4 For more information, see: KEINÄNEN, H., KUIVALAINEN, O.: Antecedents of Social Media B2B Use in Industrial Marketing Context: Customers' View. In *Journal of Business*, 2010, Vol. 30, No. 6, p. 711-722.
 5 Compare to: CAWSEY, T., ROWLEY, J.: Social Media Brand Building Strategies in B2B Companies. In *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 2016, Vol. 34, No. 6, p. 754-776; IANKOVA, S. et al.: A Comparison of Social Media Marketing between B2B, B2C and Mixed Business Models. In *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2019, Vol. 81, p. 169-179; KEINÄNEN, H., KUIVALAINEN, O.: Antecedents of Social Media B2B Use in Industrial Marketing Context: Customers' View. In *Journal of Business*, 2010, Vol. 30, No. 6, p. 711-722; MEIRE, M. et al.: The Added Value of Social Media Data in B2B Customer Acquisition Systems: A Real-Life Experiment. In *Decision Support Systems*, 2017, Vol. 104, p. 26-37.
 6 See: CHAFFEY, D. et al.: *Internet Marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice*, 4th Edition. Harlow : Pearson Education, 2009, p. 702; SABATE, F. et al.: Factors Influencing Popularity of Branded Content in Facebook Fan Pages. In *European Management Journal*, 2014, Vol. 32, No. 6, p. 1001-1011.
 7 KHO, N.: B2B Gets Social Media. In *EContent*, 2008, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 26-30.
 8 See: ROSMANN, A., STEL, G.: Sales 2.0 in Business-to-Business (B2B) Networks: Conceptualization and Impact of Social Media in B2B Sales Relationships. In ZIMMERMANN, A., ROSSMANN, A. (eds.): *Lecture Notes in Informatics (LNI)*. Bonn : Gesellschaft für Informatik (GI), 2015, p. 67-78.
 9 RYAN, D., JONES, C.: *Understanding Digital Marketing: Marketing Strategies for Engaging the Digital Generation*. Glasgow : Marketing Industry Network, 2009, p. 272.
 10 AGRESTA, S., BOUGH, B. B.: *Perspectives on Social Media Marketing*. Boston, MA : Course Technology, 2011, p. 278.
 11 MICHAELIDOU, N. et al.: Usage, Barriers and Measurement of Social Media Marketing: An Exploratory Investigation of Small and Medium B2B Brands. In *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2011, Vol. 40, No. 7, p. 1153-1159.

12 Compare to: IHS: *Social Media Use in the Industrial Sector*. East Greenbush, NY : IHS Engineering, 360 Media Solutions, 2015, p. 25; RAPP, A., PANAGOPOULOS, N. G.: Perspectives on Personal Selling and Social Media: Introduction to the Special Issue. In *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 2012, Vol. 32, No. 3, p. 301-304.
 13 Compare to: GIAMANCO, B., GREGOIRE, K.: *Tweet Me, Friend Me, Make Me Buy*: Released in July 2012. [online]. [2021-08-12]. Available at: <<https://libr.org/2012/07/tweet-me-friend-me-make-me-buy/>>; RODRIGUEZ, M. et al.: Social Media's Influence on Business-to-Business Sales Performance. In *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 2013, Vol. 32, No. 3, p. 365-378.
 14 See: SALO, J.: Social Media Research in the Industrial Marketing Field: Review of Literature and Future Research Directions. In *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2017, Vol. 66, p. 115-129.
 15 BERNOF, J.: *Latest from a Social Media Favourite: Blogs.Forrester.Com*. [online]. [2021-08-12]. Available at: <<https://www.mltcreative.com/blog/b2b-buyers-have-very-high-social-participation/>>.
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 17 For more information, see: CANHOTO, A. I., CLARK, M.: Customer Service 140 Characters at a Time – The Users' Perspective. In *Journal of Marketing Management*, 2013, Vol. 29, No. 5-6, p. 522-544; CULNAN, M. J. et al.: How Large US Companies Can Use Twitter and Other Social Media to Gain Business Value. In *MIS Quarterly Executive*, 2010, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 243-259.
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 23 NIELSEN, B. B.: The Role of Trust in Collaborative Relationships: A Multi-Dimensional Approach. In *M@n@gement*, 2004, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 239-256.
 24 DONEY, P. M., CANNON, J. P.: An Examination of Trust in Buyer-Seller Relationships. In *Journal of Marketing*, 1997, Vol. 61, No. 2, p. 35-51.

- H1: Use of social media for private purposes influences the use for business.
- H2a: Firms motivate employees to use social networks.
- H2b: A corporate culture with a positive relation to social media has a positive influence on the use of social media in the company.
- H3a: Colleagues think social networks were beneficial.
- H3b: Support by colleagues raises the use of social media for corporate purposes.
- H4: User's characteristics influence the use of social networks for corporate purposes.
- H4a: Younger people use social networks for corporate purposes more than older people.
- H4b: Men use social networks for business more than women.
- H5: The higher the perception for the usability of social networks in B2B, the higher the use in companies.

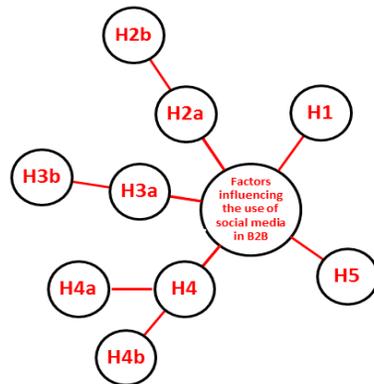


Figure 1: Diagram of the hypotheses about the factors influencing the use of social networks in B2B
Source: Own processing

3 Material and Methods

The goal of the study was to find the ways used by the selected B2B business to make its customers use social networks and what is their relationship to social networks. One of the main goals of the inquiry was to find out how B2B customers behave on social networks, how B2B business make their customers use social networks and what is motivating them in this regard. We researched the influences of personal characteristics of the employees, their psychological aspects and the corporate culture on the use of social media.²⁵ The elementary research question ran: "Do the defined factors influence use of social media in B2B environment?"

The hypotheses testing was conducted with the help of a questionnaire survey. The survey took place in a B2B company, one of the fastest developing suppliers of promotion and work clothing in the Czech Republic and Europe. In 2018, the company exceeded a turnover of 1 billion CZK and this represented triple growth compared with the year 2012. It is active in 19 countries; however, the study is limited to the Czech market only. The group of respondents is formed by customers of the company active on the Czech B2B market. They were chosen from a client database developed by the company over the years of its activities on the Czech market. This involves stable customers from the segment of advertising (advertising agencies) and the industrial production, and also customers executing one or only a few purchases (for instance, from the segment of telecommunications). The questionnaires were sent to the customers in a form of a newsletter in February 2019. The responses were then handed over to the authors for analysis. The questionnaire survey was assessed

²⁵ Compare to: BROSSEAU, D.: *Ready to Be a Thought Leader? How to Increase Your Influence, Impact, and Success*. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 2014, p. 272; GUESALAGA, R.: The Use of Social Media in Sales: Individual and Organizational Antecedents, and the Role of Customer Engagement in Social Media. In *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2016, Vol. 54, No. 1, p. 71-79; SASHI, C. M.: Customer Engagement, Buyer-Seller Relationships, and Social Media. In *Management Decision*, 2012, Vol. 50, No. 2, p. 253-272.

in the statistical software IBM SPSS and MS Excel, based on the kind of questions and hypotheses. Ordinal quantities were transferred to values (figures), provided that the most positive answer always had the highest value on a relevant scale. The figures were mutually compared with the help of a pair non-parametric test, so-called Wilcoxon signed ranks test (hypotheses H1, H2a, H3a) and the mutual correlation with the help of the Spearman and Pearson correlation coefficient (hypotheses H2a, H2b, H3b, H5). The hypothesis H4a was tested with the help of the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test. The hypothesis H4b was researched with the help of the non-parametric Chi-squared test.

4 Results and Discussion

The questionnaire survey was sent to 3,265 customers and 819 of them also displayed it. It was filled in by 346 customers, which means the total return rate was 10.6% and the return-to-display rate was 42.2%. This sample can be considered as representative. It was not necessary to any questions from the questionnaire. The highest share of the respondents was recorded for so-called micro business (with less than 10 employees), who represent 44% of the total number of respondents. The lowest share was recorded for big companies. The division based on the number of employees is displayed in Figure 2.

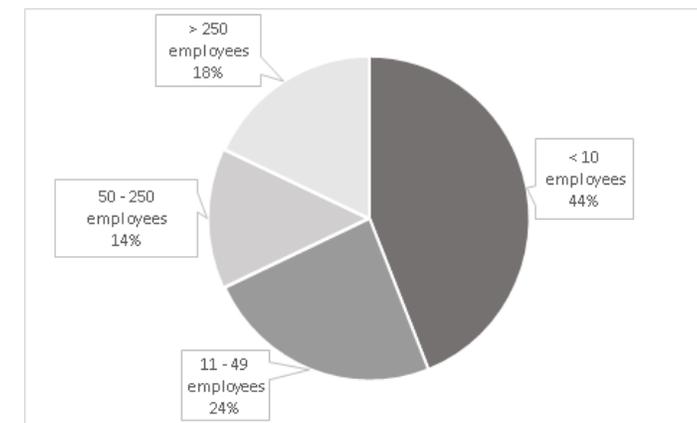


Figure 2: Company size
Source: Own processing

In terms of job position, the highest share was recorded for the leaders of companies (38%) and followed by top management members (34% of respondents). There were 195 men in the sample, i.e., 56% of the respondents. There were 151 women (44%) in the sample. According to the questionnaire, 286 respondents use *Facebook* for their business, i.e., 82.7%. 78.3% of respondents use *Facebook* in private life. This confirms that *Facebook* is the most popular social network in the Czech Republic for both business and private purposes. According to the server *newsfeed.cz*, *Facebook* was used by 5.2 million users in the first quarter of 2018 and 77% of them were active every day.²⁶ Some 45% of respondents mentioned *LinkedIn* for private and business purposes. A big difference was seen with the social network *Instagram*, which is used by 65% of respondents for private purposes and only 48% for business purposes. In our opinion, *Instagram* shows huge potential and the figures will continue to grow, thanks to functions such as hashtags, which make it possible to address a number of users, even without promoting particular messages. Generally speaking, *Twitter*, *Google+* and other social networks are not very popular in the Czech Republic, and this fact is also visible from respondents' responses (see Figure 3).

²⁶ HUŠKOVÁ, L.: *Facebook v ČR hlásí přes 5,2 milionů uživatelů*. Released on 22nd May 2018. [online]. [2021-08-03]. Available at: <<https://newsfeed.cz/facebook-v-cr-hlasi-pres-52-milionu-uzivatelu>>.

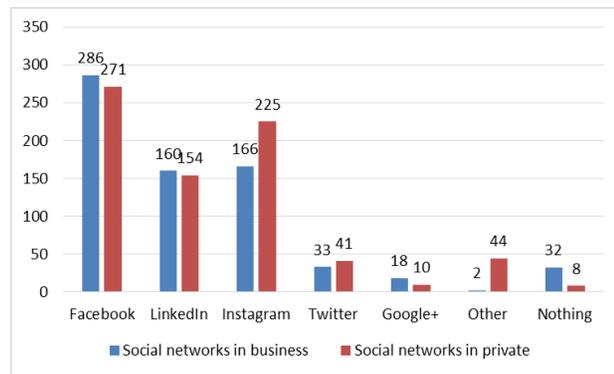


Figure 3: Social network usage

Source: Own processing

A total of 50.9% of the respondents said that *Facebook* was the best social network for business. *Facebook* was followed by *LinkedIn* with 24.9% and *Instagram* with 14.5%. Even though some companies mentioned that they were using the social networks *Twitter* and *Google+*, none of them thought they were the best for business. The hypothesis H1 was tested with help of the Wilcoxon signed ranks test for each pair of depending factors independently. The first test is focused on how respondents react to messages on social networks in the framework of business and in private. The descriptive statistics have shown that the median of answers in both factors was 3, i.e., the medium value of responses was rather yes. The average from the range 1 – 5 for reactions in a company was 2.95, while in private it reached 2.55. It is possible to use the responses to determine that the respondents answered to a large extent positively and more positive answers were recorded for reactions to messages in a company. 46 respondents were reacting to messages in the framework of business more than in private. A total of 151 respondents said that they were reacting more to private messages, while 149 respondents agreed to the responses. The Wilcoxon test showed, in this case, that reactions to messages in the framework of business (average value = 99.68) were assessed more positively than reactions on messages in the framework of the private use (average value = 96.76). The users reacted more in the framework of business than in private. The test has also shown a statistical significance between reactions, $p\text{-value} = 2.1043 \cdot 10^{-12}$, $Z = -7.027$. The Spearman correlation coefficient showed a medium relationship between reactions (0.319), i.e., a direct proportion. A reaction to messages on social networks in the framework of private use has a positive impact on reacting in the framework of business.

The second test compares whether respondents read comments below particular messages on social networks in the framework of business or in private. The median of both responses is again 3 (rather yes), the average of responses in companies is also 3 and in private 2.95. The average is only slightly different this time. The analysis says that the responses were again mainly positive and were slightly more positive in relation to business. 89 respondents said that they were reading comments in private more, while 97 said they were reading them in the framework of business. A total of 160 respondents said the ratio was equal. The test also showed that the users were reading more comments in the framework of business (average value = 97.89) compared with the private segment (average value = 88.72). However, the result of the test was statistically insignificant, $p\text{-value} = 0.235$, $Z = -1.187$. The analysis also shows that reading comments in free time does not have any influence on reading comments in the framework of business.

The last analysis was for comparing the time spent by users on social networks in a company and at home. The median of answers for both questions is 5 (every day) and the averages show the highest difference from the current measurement. The average for private use is 4.49, while it is 4.01 in a company. This means that, on average, users use social networks more at home. On the other hand, the average of the use in a company shows the use only occurs several times a week. A total of 117 respondents said that they were using social networks more frequently at home (average value = 84.40), 38 respondents use them more in a company (average value = 58.29). A total of 191 respondents spend the same time at home and in a company. The model is statistically

significant at $p\text{-value} = 1.5039 \cdot 10^{-12}$ and $Z = -7.074$. The Pearson correlation coefficient showed a strong correlation between factors and simultaneously a direct proportion ($r = 0.45$). A relationship between the tested questions has been confirmed. That is why it is possible to say that a more frequent use of social networks at home influences more frequent use of social media in a company.

It was possible to confirm two out of three assumptions and this makes it possible to consider the hypothesis H1 (the use of social media for private purposes influences the use for business) as correct. The hypothesis H2a was assessed with the help of the Wilcoxon non-parametric test. The median of both measurements is 4, so both statistical samples are divided by the possibility “I rather agree”. Both the top and bottom quantile differ. The bottom quantile differs by two levels. The average for the question “If managers influence the use of social media” was lower (3.92 for the corporate culture and 3.36 for managers). The difference between assessments came out as statistically significant ($p\text{-value} = 1.3827 \cdot 10^{-12}$, $Z = -7.086$). A total of 165 respondents stated that the corporate culture was supporting the use of social networks, more than managers themselves (average value = 116.17) and only 58 respondents provided the exact opposite response (average value = 100.14). A total of 123 respondents assessed both questions the same. Based on p and Z values, the relationship between the questions is significant, which is why it is possible to confirm the hypothesis H2a. The firms and managers support their employees in the use of social networks.

The Spearman correlation analysis for the hypothesis H2b has shown a threshold medium correlation (correlation coefficient = 0.304) between the questions “Whether a company (corporate culture) was encouraging the employees in the use of social media” and “How often were the employees using social networks” at a significance level $p = 8.2183 \cdot 10^{-9}$ at first. The correlation coefficient (0.383) for the pair of questions dealing with managers encouraging their employees to use social media and how often they were using social networks in the company showed a medium correlation. The significance level was $p = 1.5093 \cdot 10^{-13}$. Both correlations were significant with a direct proportion and showed a medium correlation between the measured items. It is thus also possible to confirm the hypothesis H2b. It is possible to say that the managers of the relevant B2B company were supporting their employees in the use of social networks. The more the company and the managers motivate their employees to use social networks, the more the employees use them in the framework of the business.

The hypothesis H3a (“Colleagues consider social networks as beneficial”) has been again assessed with the help of the Wilcoxon test. It showed that co-workers, to a small extent, support their colleagues in the use of social media (average value = 3.17); on the other hand, they themselves rather use social media (average value = 3.85). The majority of respondents claim about their co-workers that they thought that the social networks were beneficial; however, only a few of them were able to answer the question “definitely yes” (average value = 3.53). All test results came out significant and that is why it is possible to say that company employees think social networks were beneficial, even though they do not always support their colleagues in their use.

A non-parametric Spearman correlation was analysed for the hypothesis H3b (the range of correlation coefficients reached 0.167 – 0.229). All correlations came out statistically significant; however, the strength of the correlation was low in all cases. The strongest correlation was recorded between the motivation of colleagues in the use of social networks for business and the real frequency of this actually happening. It is possible to confirm the hypothesis; however, it is necessary to take into consideration a weak correlation. Generally, it is possible to say that employees use social networks and, to a lesser extent, support their colleagues in their use. As the more particular employees see the use of social networks by their colleagues, they then recommend them to others and assess them positively, as more others use them. The highest impact for the use of social networks was recorded as being the motivation for their use among employees and colleagues.

The authors also searched to see if younger people were using social networks in a company more than the older ones. The fact was analysed with the help of the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test. It showed a statistically significant difference between particular age categories, $p\text{-value} = 9.0645 \cdot 10^{-11}$, with average values for the group of respondents aged up to 29 years 209.50, for the age group 30 – 39 years 191.76, for 40 – 49 years 188.99, for 50 – 59 years 117.13 and for respondents older than 60 years 112.31. It is possible to see a trend in the decrease in the average value depending on each age group. This makes it possible to

confirm the hypothesis H4a, because younger people up to 29 years of age use social networks for business purposes the most and each age group uses social networks more than the older age group. The difference among particular respondents is much higher in terms of private use.

A chi-squared test was used to test if social networks were used for business purposes more by men or women. The p-value is 0.1982 and the Pearson contingency coefficient is 0.1306, which means that the model was insignificant and independent. It is necessary to reject the hypothesis H4b. The same test was also used for use for private purposes and the result was the same.

The last hypothesis, H5, was researched with the help of the Spearman correlation. The perception of the usability of social networks was significant in all cases. The correlation coefficient for the pair of questions related with the perception of social networks as a good marketing tool and the frequency of social network use was medium strong (0.320). The correlation "Social networks are suitable for both the company and private use" and "Innovative are those using social networks" came out weak. It is possible to confirm the hypothesis; however, it is necessary to take into consideration the low correlation strength. Table 1 displays, in a simplified way, confirmed/unconfirmed individual hypotheses:

Table 1: Evaluated hypotheses H1 – H5

Hypothesis	Confirmed x unconfirmed
H1	Confirmed
H2a	Confirmed
H2b	Confirmed
H3a	Confirmed
H3b	Confirmed
H4a	Confirmed
H4b	Unconfirmed
H5	Confirmed

Source: Own processing

Rational and objective assessment of a company as an institution should be followed by the development of individual business relations between individuals representing partner entities. The authors Agnihotri et al. said in their study that an increased involvement in social media could bring results for companies if dealers correctly use them for their purposes.²⁷ The use of social media by a dealer influences the behaviour in the field of the information communication, which raises the response-rate for dealers and the satisfaction of buyers. All the advantages encourage managers to thoroughly consider the use of social media for B2B marketing. In the case of social media, it is possible to say that the use of social networks for private purposes influences the use of social media for business purposes, because people tend to act the same in different situations. This would mean that managers using social networks for personal purposes would also use them for business purposes.²⁸ Our research has shown that *Facebook* was still the most important social network in the Czech Republic. Both companies and individuals still use 'traditional' social networks (*Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, and *Instagram*). It has been confirmed that the use of social networks in private has the most influence for the use of social networks for business purposes. If employees use social networks for private purposes on a daily basis, it is likely that they would also use them in the same way for business purposes.

27 See: AGNIHOTRI, R. et al.: Social Media: Influencing Customer Satisfaction in B2B Sales. In *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2016, Vol. 53, p. 172-180.

28 See: BAIRD, C. H., PARASNIS, G.: From Social Media to Social Customer Relationship Management. In *Strategy & Leadership*, 2011, Vol. 39, No. 5, p. 30-37.

Age has proven to be a significant factor for the use of social networks, both in a company and in private. The research showed that young people are more likely to use social networks for corporate purposes than the older ones. Age and gender can influence the behaviour of customers. For instance, customers buy different products and services over the course of their lifetime. A Finnish study published by Isokangas and Kankkunen proved that CEOs were using social media only rarely, primarily due to their rather old age.²⁹ A negative relationship between age and the willingness to use social media in a company was also confirmed by a study published by Schultz et al.³⁰

Support from managers is another important factor for the use of social networks in a company. A corporate culture positive to the use of social networks has proven to be an important factor really supporting employees in the activity. The approach to social networks (usability) was rather surprising as the coefficient was positive in every case; however, it was very low. A trust in virtual communities is developed by the generation of quality content and support of the membership in the community. A trust based on generality has an advantage in being immediate and requiring only membership of the same group.³¹ It is possible to interpret the results in a way that companies do not see social networks as usable. People tend to use technology only when they think it helps them do their job better. This is called perceived usefulness. They may also think that it would be very difficult to use the technology, which can be labelled as a perceived ease/unease of use.³² Gender was the only factor showing no dependency. In the case of this research, it is not true that men use social networks more.

5 Conclusions

B2B businesses covered by this study use their online marketing activities to address other firms. They target their managers and sales representatives. End users usually do not see such activities, as the campaigns are not targeted at them. Customers on the B2B market are specific for being right in the middle between their suppliers and end customers. They should use social networks in two different ways. One of them is to create campaigns focused on the sales of their own goods or services and the second one is to receive marketing messages from their business partners (suppliers). This particular study was focused on the relationship of a company and its B2B partners, from the view of marketing on social networks. According to the survey, a total of 82.7% of respondents use the social network *Facebook* for their business. The respondents also use *Instagram* (48%) and *LinkedIn* (45%). Some 52.6% of the respondents use social networks for business purposes and only 9.5% of them do not use social networks at all. This means that the companies are aware of the strength of social networks; however, the survey showed that there was still a large area for improvement in the perception of social networks as being a useful tool in relation to B2B.

The research question found that the majority of factors influencing the use of social networks in B2B show a low dependency due to a weak correlation. This result is surprising, because the authors expected a significant relationship between more factors. A strong correlation was shown only for the relationship between the use of social networks in private and in a company. A more frequent use of social networks at home does influence a more frequent use of social networks in a company. Social networks have proven to be essential for many companies. B2C companies use social networks to communicate both with their customers and suppliers, thus their need is not only to send marketing messages, but also to receive them. Companies operating in the B2B market are increasingly using social networks to communicate with customers. As customers in specific markets are various, marketing activities aimed at these customers should also vary. In the future, this research could be carried out for a larger amount of B2B companies. It would be possible to gain knowledge about how B2B customers behave on social networks across branches.

29 ISOKANGAS, A., KANKKUNEN, P.: *Näin sosiaalinen media muuttaa yritykset*. Painopaikka : Unigrafia Oy, 2011, p. 98.

30 SCHULTZ, R. J. et al.: Social Media Usage: An Investigation of B2B Salespeople. In *American Journal of Business*, 2012, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 174-194.

31 See: HITCHEN, E. L. et al.: Social Media: Open Innovation in SMEs Finds New Support. In *Journal of Business Strategy*, 2017, Vol. 38, No. 3, p. 21-29.

32 See: VENKATESH, V., DAVIS, F. D.: A Theoretical Extension of the Technology Acceptance Model: Four Longitudinal Field Studies. In *Management Science*, 2000, Vol. 46, No. 2, p. 186-204.

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