Social Media: friend or foe?
The rise of Social Media within Trade Associations’ domain

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"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."
-- Henry Ford

1 http://www.quotedb.com/quotes/2096
Preface

This journey began back in early 2012, when I first read the description of the research topic posted by mr. dr. T. van der Rijken.

The Social Media phenomenon has always been an intriguing topic to me. Not because I am a heavy user of Social Media per se, but because I have always been particularly interested in their multilayered concept and their impact on modern society. The chance to conduct research in this field, and to examine Social Media in both the societal as well as business context sounded truly appealing.

To me, Trade Associations were a completely new and unexplored territory, but thanks to the chance of taking an internship at Berenschot I had the opportunity to gain more experience in this particular field of business. After I had completed the internship, I was confident that I had chosen the appropriate subject for my thesis.

On my original thesis application form, there is this question included that reads: “When are you planning to finish your thesis?” The answer I filled out in regard to that question reads: “End of July 2012”. Although it may have taken me a slightly longer period than originally expected, I am happy to say now that I have completed this thesis and ended this journey.

On to the Next Adventure!
Acknowledgments

My supervisor, mr. dr. T. van der Rijken, deserves a tremendous amount of credit for helping me write this thesis and giving me his full support whenever I needed it most. Thanks to his expert guidance, encouragement, patience and understanding, I was able to finalize this work.

Additionally, I would like to thank those who stood by me, supported me, and cared for me.
Abstract
This study, which is exploratory in nature, has examined the extent to which Social Media are able to replace other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as Trade Associations. In combining principles originating from the Resource Based View of the firm, as well as principles originating from the network theory, the current study has provided insight into the rationale for organizations to engage in interorganizational collaboration. Based on academic work it has attempted to both offer a structured approach towards the benefits of engaging in interorganizational collaboration by means of Trade Associations, as well as applying a comparative assessment approach in order to examine the extent to which Social Media are able to replace Trade Associations.

The current study concluded that Social Media were only able to challenge Trade Associations in certain areas, such as networking, advisory and consultative services, and providing a sense of belonging. Moreover, the current study concluded in that Social Media were unable to challenge Trade Associations in certain areas, such as self-regulation, representative and lobbying functions, and internal organizing functions. Moreover, the research has indicated several strategic implications for Trade Associations in regard to the Social Media phenomenon.
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1 Introduction
This study concentrates on the concept of interorganizational collaboration. In the coming chapters, its aim is to provide a deepened insight into various forms in which organizations engage in collaboration. Interorganizational collaboration is examined through the concepts of Trade Associations and Social Media, and these concepts ultimately will be compared on theoretical grounds as well as with empirical data.

1.1 Interorganizational collaboration
Various forms of collaboration have been around since the early days of business, and even society. For contemporary businesses, interorganizational collaboration is oftentimes a key source of innovation, learning benefits, cost and risk reduction, and can ultimately form a source of strategic competitive advantage (Hamel, Doz, & Prahalad, 1989; Dacin et al., 2007). One of the fundamental elements in strategy research, is the analysis of why some firms are able to outperform others, despite of having access to more or less equal resources. One of the reasons mentioned in scientific journals, is interorganizational collaboration and the strongly related interorganizational transfer of knowledge (Hamel et al., 1989; Mowery, Oxley, & Silverman, 1996; Arya, & Lin, 2007).

Interorganizational collaboration is one of the key theoretical concepts in this study. Although it is hard to provide an absolute demarcation of its definition, the current study regards Interorganizational collaboration as follows: “a cooperative, interorganizational relationship that is negotiated in an ongoing communicative process, and which relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control” (Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003).

1.2 Trade Associations
Trade Associations (TAs) are sector related, nonprofit organizations, established in order to generate synergetic effects for its members, which join the association on a voluntary basis (Bennett, 1999). TAs represent the collective interests (e.g., policy interests, legislation, and regulation) of a group of members of a particular industry and can thus be seen as institutionalized representations of interorganizational collaboration (Boléat, 1996). When referring to TAs, this study applies the following definition by Schmidt, Van den Toren, & De Wal (2003), whom describe a TA as a “national organization which, in a particular industry, organizes enterprises, entrepreneurs or (public) organizations (who generally employ
workers), and represents their interests, whereas the individual enterprises/entrepreneurs have the choice whether to join or not.”

TAs are widely recognized as having a significant economic and social contribution to both businesses and society, and also have been able to develop and mature over time as autonomous organizational entities (Van Waarden, 1992; Boléat, 1996; Schmidt et al., 2003). However, while TAs have long been sheltered from the forces that usually challenge an organizations’ business model (i.e., economic, technological, social, competitive, and regulatory forces), and may even opt for drastic strategic change, this, no longer seems to be the case (Boléat, 2000; Bennet, & Robson, 2011).

More recently, the changes in relation to the contemporary role of TAs has been questioned by various scholars (e.g., Boléat, 2000; Tack, & Beusmans, 2001; Schmidt et al., 2003). In this context, scholars have mentioned such external threats as: increasing individualization, deregulation, and globalization, and also the strong development of information and communication technologies (e.g., the internet, and IT-related applications and services) (Boléat, 2000; Tack, & Beusmans, 2001; Schmidt et al., 2003; Van der Rijken, 2011).

1.3 Internet usage

Since its introduction some decades ago, consumers traditionally have been using the internet mainly as a portal that provided them access to various sources of content. It enabled them to target and obtain information faster and with much greater ease than ever before (Tapscott, 2008; Qualman, 2009). The widely acknowledged benefits of the internet as a source for information and its connective abilities have led to a quick adoption amongst the world’s population. As the number of functionalities offered by the internet grew exponentially over the years, so did its number of users.

Not long ago, the Dutch celebrated the 25th anniversary of their first adoption of the internet back in 1988 and a quick review of the transition of the role and societal relevance the internet has made over the past quarter-century learns that the number of internet users, together with the frequency of internet usage has grown considerably and that the purpose of

2 http://nutech.nl/internet/3629554/nederland-internetland-25-jaar-online.html
internet usage focusses heavily on gaining access to information resources as well as engagement in Social Media\(^3\) applications.

1.4 Social Media

Over time, the internet has evolved into becoming a host environment for numerous of interconnected social platforms, utilized by its consumers in many different ways (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010). At this very moment, while you are reading this paper, hundreds of millions of people are participating in online communities around the globe. Together they share large amounts of information in the form of documents, post messages and video clips, as well as engage in various discussions, collaborative projects, and product reviews (Safko, 2010). These users together embody what is referred to by scholars as the *social media phenomenon* (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

The social media phenomenon is defined in this study as: “*a group of internet-based applications, that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content*” (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010).

In the current age which is strongly defined by networks, numerous social platforms provide its interconnected actors with the opportunity to acquire and exchange different types of information (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992; Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2010). As on- and offline networks grow closer every day, organizations are getting increasingly embedded into networks of social and professional exchange relationships with other organizational actors (Gulati, 1999; Qualman, 2009; Safko, 2010). The introduction of social network giant Facebook into the New York Stock Exchange in mid-2012, not only affirmed that Social Media, which will be referred to as SM in the remainder of this study, are a force to be reckoned with, but also highlights some of its business related impact.\(^4\)

2 Problem discussion

Since businesses and consumers are becoming more and more intertwined with one another every day, SM really are proving to become a game changer for market participants and their subsequent strategies (OECD, 2007). Business executives today for instance, are less than ever before in control of the flow of information related to their own organizations, let alone

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\(^4\) [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204879004577110780078310366.html](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204879004577110780078310366.html)
the direction and speed at which the information is flowing (Qualman, 2009; Safko, 2010). The legitimacy of the firm is shifting from private, demarcated entities (i.e., simply creating and pushing products), to a more publicly influenced one, increasingly requiring firms to listen, engage, and react to the voice of the consumer (Qualman, 2009).

In relation to the strategic challenges that contemporary TAs are facing, SM too can become a game changer. In its ability to connect actors, enable the exchange of specialized information, and to provide collaborative opportunities, SM are increasingly able to provide services that are in fact similar to the current value proposition of TAs. Moreover, since TAs do not enjoy a uniquely protected position, and since many of their services could hypothetically be provided by other agents, such as SM, they are thus subject to competition (Boléat, 1996; 2000).

2.1 Research gap
SM are a relatively new phenomenon, and its suggested potential for interorganizational collaboration in a business-to-business context has received limited attention in strategy research.

Novel technologies, such as SM, have been identified in research as a potential external threat to the viability of TAs (Tack, & Beusmans, 2001; Kroese, & Pouwels, 2011; Van der Rijken, 2011; Tack, & Tack, 2011). Furthermore, a growing number of scholars (e.g., Kroese, & Pouwels, 2011; Tack, & Tack, 2011) have attempted to suggest the impact of the development of SM in regard to TAs. Yet, to date little or no empirical research has been conducted in order to verify their findings. The current study will aim to fill this gap in research. To be able to effectively examine the extent to which SM can provide business related purposes for interorganizational collaboration, the current study will examine and compare the implications for interorganizational collaboration of both TAs and SM.

2.2 Research question
By comparing the characteristics of interorganizational collaboration via TAs and collaboration by means of SM, the primary objective of this research is to explore the ways in which both collaboration initiatives are similar, and to what extent they are exchangeable. In light of strategic considerations, it is the aim of this study to examine whether SM are able to challenge the viability a traditional form of interorganizational collaboration: TAs. It is
interesting to analyze in what ways SM could prove to be an extension of TAs and what features SM are still missing to be able to completely replace TAs. The central research question, therefore, is formulated as follows:

**To what extent can Social Media replace other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as Trade Associations?**

The justification for the suggested comparison stems from the fact that the characteristics of both forms of collaboration are similar, and thus comparable. Most importantly, SM, like TAs, consist of interconnected actors, who collectively form networks and together create value through collaboration, and by means of information exchange, the stimulation of knowledge transfer and development, as well as encouraging innovation (Tack, & Beusmans, 2001; Safko, 2010). Also, both SM, and TAs are known for their relative ease of access and low barriers to entry (Qualman, 2009; Bennett, & Robson, 2011).

### 2.3 Research outline

The coming chapters will first provide a detailed literature review of the concept of interorganizational collaboration. Additionally, both the characteristics as well as the contemporary role of TAs will be put forward. Next, a similar literature review will be carried out in order to provide more insight into the general concept of SM on the one hand, and on its potential for its participants to engage in collaboration on the other.

Next, the theoretical framework, which combines theoretical concepts from both the resource based view of the firm, as well as principles originating from network theory, will shed light on the rationale for organizations to engage in interorganizational collaboration. The proposed theoretical framework will put more emphasis on the motives for organizations to engage in interorganizational collaboration via TA membership by way of a cost-benefit analysis. A similar cost-benefit analysis will be carried out based on interorganizational collaboration through SM.

Additionally, the results of the semi-structured interviews that have been conducted in order to provide the qualitative data, necessary to evaluate the proposed assumptions and ultimately provide an answer to the research questions, will be presented. The following analysis of the
findings will put forward the extent to which the motives for interorganizational collaboration via both TAs and SM are exchangeable and to what extent they are not.

Subsequently, conclusions in regard to answering the research question will be drawn based on the findings from the interviews. Finally, a comprehensive discussion will be presented, covering an overview of the limitations of the current research, as well as implications for further research and a critical reflection on its managerial relevance.

3 Interorganizational collaboration

The following paragraphs will take a closer look at the concept of interorganizational collaboration by first providing its practiced definition in this research, and additionally by providing insight in the strategic objectives that encompass interorganizational collaboration as well as the various forms interorganizational collaboration can take in practice.

3.1 Interorganizational collaboration definition

Although the significance of strategic alliance formation and interfirm relationships has grown considerably in recent years (e.g., Dacin, Oliver, & Roy, 2007), it remains difficult to find an unambiguous interpretation of the concept interorganizational collaboration in business literature. Collaboration between different organizations is mentioned to occur for example across multiple industries (e.g., Daugherty et al., 2006), within a single industry (e.g., Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2000), and can have a horizontal or vertical configuration (e.g., Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000).

Interorganizational collaboration was early defined by Nisbet (1972) as “all activity undertaken jointly or in collaboration with others, and which is directed towards common interests or achieving rewards.” Following the work of Daugherty et al. (2006), collaboration generally involves two or more independent companies working together to jointly achieve greater success than can be attained in isolation. Within these definitions, these scholars emphasize the interorganizational relationships which underlie the collaborative practices.

This research will practice the definition presented by Hardy et al. (2003), whom define interorganizational collaboration as “a cooperative, interorganizational relationship that is negotiated in an ongoing communicative process, and which relies on neither market nor
hierarchical mechanisms of control”, and stress that this definition has a broad orientation so that it encompasses a wide range of collaborative arrangements (e.g., consortium, joint ventures, networks, and associations.

The advantage of practicing this particular definition in relation to TAs, comes from the addition of the latter part. By stating namely, that neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control are included, it allows a distinction from those cooperative relationships where cooperation is either purchased (e.g., through supplier relationships), or based on some form of legitimate authority (e.g., operating within a certain jurisdiction) (Hardy et al., 2003). In other words, this definition recognizes the notion that collaboration is oftentimes a multi-layered concept which concerns local institutional conditions and organizational autonomy to form relationships taking place outside structures of capitalism and hierarchal authority (Phillips et al., 2000).

3.2 Strategic needs for interorganizational collaboration
In order to adequately face the challenges that advance from various changes in an organizations business environment, renewing and leveraging cooperative relations with suppliers, customers, and also competitors (e.g., engaging in TA membership), enable organizations to better align core capabilities, skills, assets, and resources to ultimately obtain a competitive advantage within a particular business sector (Rademakers, 2000).

Collaborative activities can for involve among others: knowledge and information sharing; program coordination; joint planning; sharing of administrative services; and joint programming (i.e., combining research programs) (Guo, & Acar, 2005). These collaborative practices are usually encouraged by a number of underlying strategic objectives, such as for example increased and diversified knowledge transfer (Daugherty et al., 2006), gaining new competencies (Eisenhardt, & Schoonhoven, 1996), acquiring resources and skills that cannot be produced internally (Hardy et al., 2003), and facilitating the creation of new knowledge (Gulati et al., 2000).

3.3 Interorganizational collaboration structures
As partnerships with external actors have become a key strategy for many organizations, it is oftentimes mentioned by scholars that, similar to the promotion of Various strategic
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motivations to engage into collaborative action, firms also choose to collaborate via a number of collaborative structures (Lorenzoni, & Lipparini, 1999; Gulati et al., 2000; Hardy et al., 2003). Collaborative arrangements that are mentioned are among others: consortia, strategic alliances, joint ventures, roundtables, networks, and associations (Hardy et al., 2003).

4 Trade Associations

As already pointed out, the current study examines the concept of interorganizational collaboration through the organizational structure of TAs. Continuing on its introduction in the first pages of this research, the following paragraphs will provide a more detailed and thorough understanding of the characteristics, organizational structure, role and function as well as a workable definition of TAs. Additionally, the role and contribution of TAs will be highlighted, and the rationale for TA membership and logic of membership will be clarified.

4.1 Trade Association characterization

TAs have some highly distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from other forms of interorganizational collaboration, as well as collaborative strategies in general. In his comprehensive work, Boléat (1996; 2003) mentions three essential characteristics of TAs: first, TAs are member-based organizations, (i.e., the members being not individuals but businesses); second, the ultimate governing body of the TA, comprises representatives of its members, and members are involved more generally in the decision-making process; and third, all TA members share a common interest.

According to Bennett, & Robson (2011), TAs differ from other business services (e.g., consultants, lawyers and accountants, trade suppliers, and government agencies) in that they not solely provide priced services, but additionally offer for instance social activities, collective services (e.g., group insurance, and purchasing), and also take on the important function of lobbying and the representation of the collective interests of its member organizations (Bennett, & Robson, 2011).

As TA membership, according to Bennett (2000), is a matter of choice, the existence of TAs logically, is based on the added value and thus the fact that businesses want them to do so. The rationale for the existence of TAs, thus reflects its ability to provide requested services to its members more efficiently and effectively than each of its members is able to obtain
4.2 Trade Association definition
Different scholars have provided definitions of TAs over time and they oftentimes reflect the distinct characteristics mentioned above. In his work on TA strategy and management, Boléat (1996) provides the following definition: “trade associations are established by a number of organisations, operating in the same market and often in competition with each other, to represent them and provide them with services. (…) The members of the association provide the governing body and finance. (…) They are not profit-seeking organisations, although increasingly they are expected to be run on businesslike lines.”

This study will apply the definition of TAs by Schmidt et al. (2003), whom describe TAs as a “national organization which, in a particular industry, organizes enterprises, entrepreneurs or (public) organizations (who generally employ workers), and represents their interests, whereas the individual enterprises/entrepreneurs have the choice whether to join or not.”

4.3 Trade Association categorization
An early categorization of TAs accrues from the work of Boléat (1996), in which the author distinguishes four categories of TAs that apply to the general outlines of this study, being: industry associations, which represent a single, demarcated industrial sector; multi-industry associations, which cover more than one identifiable industrial sector; specialized associations, which can exist within industry associations and may for example comprise particular sizes of organization or companies in a particular region; and federal associations, which comprise a number of separate TAs grouped together under an umbrella organization.

4.4 Trade Association role
In order to better understand the role and function of TAs in the contemporary economy and society, it is best to first take a brief glance at some of its foundations.

In both European as well as United States-based research, the establishment of early TAs is largely attributed as a reaction to the unpredictable free market capitalism, as well as the increasing interference and ambiguous role of the government (Best, 1990; Van Waarden, 1992; Bouwens, & Dankers, 2004). Additionally, in order to moderate the concentration of
power in either private or public hands, and to gain a means for protecting their industries, intermediate institutions between businesses and the government were created (Best, 1990).

The role of contemporary TAs is still securely located in-between the market on the one hand and the state on the other, and within this intermediary role, TAs are regarded as an extension of the market through the eyes of the government, and as a moderate representation of government rules and regulations through the eyes of the market (Tack, & Beusmans, 2001).

4.5 Trade Association functions

According to the British Trade Association Forum, TAs carry out many valuable and lawful functions which provide a public benefit. In their role as intermediary organizations, however, TAs need to balance their position alongside four comprising logics, in order to successfully provide these functions (Schmitter, & Streeck, 1981).

In accordance with the work of Schmitter, & Streeck (1981), the *logic of membership* concerns the extent to which TAs “offer sufficient incentives to their members to extract from them adequate resources to ensure their survival, if not growth;” the *logic of influence* addresses the question whether TAs “offer sufficient incentives to enable them to gain access to and exercise adequate influence over public authorities (…) to extract from this exchange adequate resources (recognition, toleration, concessions, subsidies, et cetera) enabling them to survive and to prosper;” the *logic of efficient implementation* concerns the extent to which TAs are internally organized in order to operate efficiently and effectively; and the *logic of goal-formation* covers the question whether TAs are flexible enough to enable widespread membership involvement in order to integrate.

In order to be viable, TAs thus need to attend all four logics, and in correspondence, doing so would involve TAs in four types of activity: participation for members; representation of members; services to members; and control over members (Appendix 1) (Schmitter, & Streeck, 1981). Furthermore, Tack, & Beusmans (2001) make a distinction between three, of what they argue to be, critically important factors to the prosperity and success of TAs, and embody these factors in their so-called propeller model (Appendix 2). All three factors are a reflection of the key functions of a TA and are intertwined in a way that they can mutually

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influence one another. The way to effectively and efficiently manage them is captured within the infrastructure, at the very heart of the model, as well as the organization.

4.6 Trade Association changing environment

As mentioned before, TAs, as intermediary organizations, find themselves ever encompassed in an ongoing exchange relationship with third party entities. Yet, in order to be successful, and even survive, they not only have to balance their capacity for action alongside the four competing logics, but also have to struggle and balance their organization to overcome various trends and changes in their environment (Boléat, 1996; Schmidt et al., 2003).

Boleat (2000) acknowledges six inter-related factors that are changing the operating environment for TAs and which apply to TAs in all countries and each sector: first, the increasing degree of concentration within industries can put pressure on the TAs’ subscription income; second, globalization oftentimes implies more globally focused businesses, which can endanger the nationally oriented TA; third, the blurring of boundaries between markets and institutions may challenge specialized TAs; fourth, deregulation and privatization will require a new means for organizing within competitive markets; fifth, increasing pressure from government institutions and (larger) members on resource allocation, forces TAs to organize representative mechanisms more effectively through for example increased collaboration; and sixth, developments in information technology transform the way TAs operate and also changes the attitudes of all actors involved towards the acquisition and distribution of information.

The latter relates directly to one of the core elements of this study, given that SM, as highlighted before as basically being the latest outcome of the developments in the field of information and communication technology. According to Bennett (2000), TAs are able to sustain, because businesses want them to do so, implying that they may eventually dissolve, should the need for their existence diminish or possibly shift to other forms of collaboration, such as potentially SM. Furthermore, research by Andriole (2010), finds in this context, that these particular technologies can help improve collaboration and communication across multiple organizations and industries, and can thus be regarded as a potential source of competition for TAs, especially when TAs fail to operate effectively (Boléat, 1996).
5 Social Media

Many executives struggle to gain an understanding of what SM are, what kind of benefits could possibly accrue from the use of SM in a business context and also what kind of challenges (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Therefore, the following paragraphs will provide a more detailed insight into the SM phenomenon. First, a description of its characteristics and surrounding concepts of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content will be presented; second, the definition of SM practiced in this study will be proposed; third, a categorization of the various types of SM are put forward; fourth, the characteristics and demographics of SM users will be provided; and finally, the business implications of the use of SM in terms of interorganizational collaboration will be highlighted.

5.1 Web 2.0 and User Generated Content

In modern business literature, SM are oftentimes mentioned accompanied with concepts, such as Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC). To be better able to denote these concepts, it is best to take a step back and examine the origins and linkage of both concepts and SM.

As noted in the first introductory paragraph of this paper, the internet was originally used in a different way from today. The main goal of consumers was to gain access to diverse information sources, while the main goal for organizations was to establish an online presence and to make their information available anytime, and anywhere (Tapscott, 2008; Qualman, 2009). Internet nowadays is characterized by the numerous applications which allow users to both access, share, and create all sorts of interactive content (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010).

The transformation of internet, from a place where one mainly finds information (Web 1.0) to a place where one can share information, collaborate on projects of mutual interest, and find new ways to solve problems (Web 2.0) (Tapscott, 2008), was underlined by two fundamental drivers, namely the development of a supporting infrastructure and applications, as well as the increasing desire for new ways of social interaction and the creation of interactive content (O'Reilly, 2007; Tapscott, 2008; Mergel, Schweik, & Fountain, 2009).

5.1.1 Web 2.0 characterization

As mentioned above, the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 was strongly underlined by a technological development. Still, Web 2.0 cannot be defined merely as an update of its
predecessor (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010), nor can it be captured in a unitary interpretation (Murugesan, 2007; O'Reilly, 2007). Web 2.0 can best be viewed as a platform which involves all applications and essential technology, that supports and facilitates consumers in a way that they are able to collaborate and share information through interconnected actors, and thus create network effects through continuous participation (Murugesan, 2007; O'Reilly, 2007).

Constantinides, & Fountain (2008) define Web 2.0 as “a collection of open-source, interactive and user-controlled online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes. Additionally, the authors emphasize that “Web 2.0 applications support the creation of informal users’ networks facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing the generation, dissemination, sharing and editing/refining of informational content” (Constantinides, & Fountain, 2008).

5.1.2 User Generated Content characterization

Aside from the technological evolution, there has also been a social driver that influenced the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (Tapscott, 2008; Mergel et al., 2009). In his book *Grown up digital*, Tapscott (2008) describes how the Net Generation – those people born between 1977 and 1997 and matured alongside the technology – not only use the internet in different ways than other people do, but also, and more importantly, have an unchallenged desire for connecting, sharing, and creating content. This UGC can be seen as the fruit of all ways in which consumers make use of SM (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010), was ultimately developed through the use of Web 2.0 applications, and comprises various types of media and creative works (OECD, 2007).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007), indicate three central characteristics for UGC to be determined as such. First, UGC is required to be published either on a publicly accessible website, or on a page on a social networking site only accessible to a select group of people; second, the publisher needs to add a certain amount of value to the work through creative effort, and third, it needs to be created outside of professional routines and practices, thus having no institutional or commercial market context (OECD, 2007).
5.2 Social Media characterization and definition

SM can be depicted by taking a closer look at its terminology. The first part of this terminology, social, refers to the basic human need to connect and exchange information with other human beings (Safko, 2010). Social relations are formed as humans have a strong desire to be around like-minded people with whom they are able to share their feelings, beliefs and understandings (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). The second part, media, refers to the various channels via which actors are able to establish these social connections and exchange of information (Safko, 2010). These channels are what has been described earlier, as a bundle of applications and underlying technology, used to effectively reach out and connect with other actors (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010; Safko, 2010).

Combining these two elements, and following the work of Kaplan, & Haenlein (2010), SM are defined in the current study as: “A group of internet-based applications, that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of UGC.”

5.3 Social Media categorization

Within the general definition presented above, various types of SM can be distinguished. As a categorization of SM are still lacking a general understanding in research, a literature review shows various categorizations of the phenomenon. In an attempt to categorize the entire field of SM, Safko (2010), for instance, mentions 15 different categories of SM: social networking, publish, photo sharing, audio, video, microblogging, livecasting, virtual worlds, gaming, productivity applications, aggregators, RSS, search, mobile, and interpersonal. Safko (2010).

A different approach to categorize SM stems from the work of Constantinides, & Fountain (2008), whom regard continuous consumer participation – thus, not only being a content consumer but also, and more generally, being a content contributor, reviewer and editor – as a fundamental element for all SM categories, and have distinguished 5 main categories of SM: blogs, social networks, (content) communities, forums/ bulletin boards, and content aggregators (Constantinides, & Fountain, 2008).

In their work, Kaplan, & Haenlein (2010), propose a scheme (Appendix 3), which is based on a set of theories which originate from both the field of media research as well as social
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processes, and which they regard to be the two key elements of any type of SM. Following their logic, SM can be categorized, on the one hand, based on the richness of the medium and the degree of social presence it allows, and on the other hand, based on the degree of self-disclosure it requires and the type of self-presentation it allows (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010).

Although overlap among different categories of SM can occur (e.g., social networking sites that allow microblogging), a categorization of SM is useful for the sake of both clarity and simplicity. Since the present study focuses on the prospects of SM for interorganizational collaboration, the categorization of SM should reflect that same focus. Therefore, the following paragraphs offer a categorization of SM which reflects the collaboration and cooperation potential for consumers, such as collaborating in particular projects, and sharing as well as organizing knowledge and information. See also Appendix 4 for a schematic description and examples of SM categorization.

5.3.1 Social networking sites

Social networking sites cover those applications, that enable users to connect through online networks and to interact with people of similar interest and background (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010). The goal of social networking sites, is to build trust in a given community (e.g., social, professional, and educational) (Safko, 2010). Social networking sites allow users to build personal websites which are accessible to other users for exchange of personal content and communication such as photos, video, audio files, and blogs (Constantinides, & Fountain, 2008). Some social networking sites are dedicated especially to particular topics, sharing knowledge, or the purchase of products and services (OECD, 2007).

5.3.2 (Micro)Blogs

The term blog originates from the word weblog and blogs basically are the representation of an online journal (Constantinides, & Fountain, 2008). Blog entries, also known as blog posts, are usually displayed in reverse chronological order (Murugesan, 2007); tend to be written in a personal, conversational style (Mayfield, 2008); are updated regularly (Zarrella, 2010); and are considered to be a form of expression and a means to maintain and build social connections (OECD, 2007). (Micro)blogging allows those who participate to create small, intimate communities that are concentrated around topics such as politics, technology or business issues (Safko, 2010). (Micro)blogging allows users to send messages, audio (e.g.,
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podcasts), video and even attached files and enables them to make friends; give and receive advice; obtain real-time news updates; identify, research, and purchase products and services; inform clients; and so on (Safko, 2010).

5.3.3 Content aggregators
Feed reader or content aggregator programs can send web pages, blogs, audio, video, and photographs automatically to people who subscribe to the specific content through a feed, without them having to take the time to visit all of their favorite websites every day for new content and updates (Safko, 2010). The technology associated with these kind of applications is called RSS (Really Simple Syndication), and this technology allows someone to link not just to a web page, but to subscribe to it, receiving a notification each time a web page changes or adds content (O’Reilly, 2007). Subscribed users can transform the specific transmitted data into information through an RSS reader (OECD, 2007). The RSS reader operates as a binding and filtering channel for the subscribed feeds (Levy, 2009).

5.3.4 Content communities
Content communities share some similarities with social networking sites, although these kind of websites primarily attend to the organizing and sharing of particular types of media content between users (Constantinides, & Fountain, 2008; Mayfield, 2008). Content communities help share a wide range of different media types, including text, photos, videos, bookmarked links, and presentations (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010).

5.3.5 Forums
Forums are one of the oldest forms of SM applications, and are a powerful and popular element of online communities (Mayfield, 2008). Forums are those web sites that provide users with areas for online discussion, enabling users to exchange ideas and information by posting messages which usually are tied around specific topics and interests (OECD, 2007; Constantinides, & Fountain, 2008). Although the concept of forums appears to be very similar to that of blog posts, there is an important difference between the two. Blog posts namely, are usually submitted by a single user, whereas forums usually have larger communities and have a richer conversation structure which can be used for argumentative discussions (Lange, Bojars, Groza, Breslin, & Handschuh, 2008).
5.3.6 Collaborative projects
This SM concept is oftentimes associated with that of Wikis. A Wiki is a structured website, which offers users democracy over its content, given that they are allowed to add, remove and otherwise edit and change existing content in a continuous collaborative process (OECD, 2007; Mayfield, 2008; Levy, 2009). The central idea underlying these collaborative projects is that the joint effort of many actors leads to a better outcome than any actor could achieve individually (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010).

In their article, Kaplan, & Haenlein (2010) state that “firms must be aware that collaborative projects are trending toward becoming the main source of information for many consumers.” According to Murugesan (2007), the growing success of collaborative projects is due to its possibility for asynchronous contribution; excellent means to annotate information or discuss evolving issues; higher communication efficiency and productivity; ease of user participation; and support for harnessing the power of diverse individuals to create collaborative works.

5.4 Social Media user classification
Now that the SM phenomenon has been characterized, defined and categorized, it is interesting to take a closer observation on the characteristics of its users. Since the evolution of internet-based SM applications, alongside that of Web 2.0, the internet has increasingly become a platform for user participation and interaction, and moreover has been labeled as the participative web (OECD, 2007). Li, & Bernoff (2011) analyzed and classified SM users based on their degree of participation and approach towards social technologies. This study embraces their classification of SM consumers, which has ultimately led to a distinction of seven, frequently overlapping, levels of user participation in SM: creator, conversationalist, critic, collector, joiner, spectator, and inactive (Li, & Bernoff, 2011).

Following the work of Li, & Bernoff (2011), the highest level of SM participation is that of creator. Creators are those consumers who publish and maintain web pages and blogs, and who publish content on websites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr). Second, conversationalists voice their opinions through participating in typical back-and-forth interactions known to for example SNS. The next level, critic, belongs to those consumers who regularly place a comment on blogs, and who post ratings and reviews on destined websites. Critics are selective as to where they submit their posts and often use existing blog posts or content as the
foundation for their contribution. Collectors are consumers that create metadata through collecting and aggregating content and making it accessible to other users. Joiners make up the fourth level of SM participation. These consumers oftentimes maintain and participate in one or multiple profile pages on SNS and visit them regularly. Next come spectators, who consume all types of content that is being produced by other consumers. The final level is that of inactive consumers, who do not participate on SM at all.

5.5 Social Media user demographics
Aside from determining in what ways consumers are participating in SM, it is interesting to analyze who is active online and who is not. First of all, it needs to be said that having access to the internet, as well as the regularity of using it is becoming ever more commoditized. In the Netherlands for example, in 2011, 94.0% of all Dutch households have internet access, versus 78.0% back in 2005. Moreover, in these same households, daily internet use has increased from 68.0% in 2005, to 86.0% in 2011.

Over the years, SM participation, logically, has increased together with that of internet usage. Although the initial gap is decreasing and SM are becoming more common for all ages, teens and young adults are more likely than older generations to participate on SNS; seek entertainment through online content; read other people’s blogs and publish their own; and send messages to friends (Jones, & Fox, 2009; Zickuhr, 2010). In contrast, older generations use SM more frequently than teens and young adults, for information inquiries; buying products online; and searching for information on health and religious issues (Jones, & Fox, 2009).

5.6 Social Media collaboration potential
In order to gain a better insight of the potential SM offers to support collaborative interactions, consulting firm Accenture conducted a research among executives of over 200 US-based organizations. The research, which emphasized on externally-focused SM prospects, showed consensus among the organizations executives as to the importance of SM as a tool to engage in innovation and collaboration efforts, and also that: “social media is an important mechanism for interacting with customers, business partners and other key stakeholders” (Quiring, 2011). Furthermore, they stress the importance for firms to establish

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an open environment (i.e., one that welcomes ideas, collaboration, contribution and evaluation) as it will allow key stakeholders to actively participate in the organizations innovation process, which eventually will lead to higher economic returns (Quiring, 2011).

6 Theory
Participating in interorganizational collaboration not only endorses a particular organization to guard itself against uncertainties in the competitive environment (Lorenzoni, & Lipparini, 1999; Dacin et al., 2007), but can also provide it with certain opportunities to gain a competitive edge (Dacin et al., 2007). Since TAs merely are representations of interorganizational collaboration (Boléat, 1996), through participating in one, an organization is thus offered with a potential means for survival and also prosperity (e.g., Schmitter, & Streeck, 1981; Doner, & Schneider, 2000).

6.1 Background and theory development
The strategic benefits of interorganizational collaboration via TAs seem obvious, yet some organizations choose not to participate in such collaborative practices. Given that organizations generally obtain TA membership through a process of choice (Boléat, 1996; Bennet, & Robson, 2011), the decision to become a member of a TA, rationally, thus depends on a cost/benefit analysis (Bennett, 1999). More explicitly put, an organization that considers joining a TA, will make sure the benefits accruing from membership (e.g, collective action, information and resources, representation, professional development, insurance and money saving opportunities), exceed the costs (e.g., contribution, obligations, waste of time and effort) (Boléat, 2003).

So then what factors instigate this particular analysis of costs and benefits? To date, different theoretical approaches have been considered in order to explain the formation of interorganizational collaboration linkages between potential competitors (e.g., Eisenhardt, & Schoonhoven, 1996; Lorenzoni, & Lipparini, 1999; Ahuja, 2000). The traditional theoretical stance in this matter originates from transaction cost economics theory, which emphasizes the logic of single-party cost optimization in both internal and external interactions (Lorenzoni, & Lipparini, 1999). By primarily focusing on transaction characteristics, static efficiency, and routine situations, this approach however, tends to neglect important strategic and social incentives that underpin the formation of collaborative interfirm linkages (Eisenhardt, &
Schoonhoven, 1996; Lorenzoni, & Lipparini, 1999; Arya, & Lin, 2007).

In an attempt to provide an explanation to the central research question, “To what extent can social media replace other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as trade associations?”, the current study will draw upon two alternative, yet widely accepted theoretical frameworks, namely the resource-based view of the firm as well as network theory. Together, these interdisciplinary concepts will provide a better understanding of the relation between both strategic aspects and aspects of social embeddedness on the one hand and collaborative behavior on the other, and will also provide more insight into the rationale for interorganizational collaboration. Subsequently, based on the proposed theory, a comparison will be made between TAs and SM as a means for interorganizational collaboration.

6.2 Resource-Based View of the firm

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm observes organizations in terms of the resources they possess, rather than in terms of the products and or services they offer (Wernerfelt, 1984; Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2010). Following the work of Caves (1980), resources are those fixed assets or factors, both tangible (e.g., physical assets) and intangible (e.g., human skills, knowledge, and experience), which are semi-permanently tied to the firm. According to Wernerfelt (1984), resources can be “anything which could be thought of as a strength or weakness of a given firm”, for example: brand names, in-house knowledge of technology, employment of skilled personnel, trade contacts, efficient procedures, capital, et cetera.

In his work, Ahuja (2000), presents three distinctive characteristics, derived from the work of Barney (1986) and Dierickx, & Cool (1989), whom in this context characterize resources as follows: first, “they create value for the firm, i.e., they help firms to either reduce cost of inputs, or obtain greater prices for outputs”; second, “they are often firm-specific in nature and are either unavailable outside the creating firm or suffer a diminution in their value if separated from the creating firm”; third, “they are likely to be asset-stocks whose creation requires accumulation over time”. The latter part illustrates that it takes time and effort for the development of certain resources and that firms are thus unable to develop them at any given moment in time.

According to the RBV, organizational behavior can be interpreted best as an ongoing search
for competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Ahuja, 2000; Kraaijenbrink, 2010). In order to gain a competitive edge over competitors, firms attempt to create a situation where its own resource position directly or indirectly makes it more difficult for other firms to catch up, by way of assembling unique configurations of both complementary and specialized resources and capabilities (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Kraaijenbrink, 2010). Whether or not a competitive advantage is sustained, generally depends on the possibility of competitive duplication (Barney, 1991).

6.2.1 Resource-Based View of the firm and interorganizational collaboration

Following the RBV theory, organizations strive to gain a competitive advantage over competitors, and do so through their resource asset configurations. Yet, despite these efforts, particular resources not only are unavailable for purchase in factor markets because they are strongly firm-specific, they also may require time to build up (Ahuja, 2000). Thus, it is fair to say that not all firms are individually able to obtain the particular resources that are needed for a competitive advantage. The search for resources on the one hand and the difficulties in obtaining them on the other, is believed to influence organizations’ strategic behavior towards collaborative link formation (Dyer, & Singh, 1998; Ahuja, 2000; Arya, & Lin, 2007).

RBV theorists stress that a firm is able to gain a competitive advantage through resources and capabilities that are specifically owned and controlled by a single firm and accordingly, the search for competitive advantage has thus concentrated on those resources that are located within the firm (Dierickx, & Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991). Other scholars however, emphasize that critical resources not necessarily only exist within a particular firm, but may extend beyond the firm boundaries (Dyer, & Singh, 1998; Gulati, 1999; Arya, & Lin, 2007). Through forming collaborative ties with other organizations, firms are thus able to gain access to resources that create value for the firm, but which are not specifically available for purchase in factor markets, and also may require time to build up (Lorenzoni, & Lippiari, 1999; Ahuja, 2000).

Following this logic, organizations are encouraged to form collaborative relationships, because doing so allows them to acquire resources – through the direct transfer of assets, the sharing of key equipment, intellectual property, or personnel, and the transfer of organizational knowledge – which they cannot develop internally, yet provide them with a
source of competitive advantage over competing firms who are unable or unwilling to form such interfirm linkages (Hamel et al., 1989; Dyer, & Singh, 1998; Hardy et al., 2003).

6.3 Network theory
Although the RBV takes a strategic point of view on the rationale for some organizations to engage in interorganizational collaboration whereas others do not, this theoretical approach however, pays less attention to the fact that organizations are, above all, social entities which are embedded in networks of social, professional, and exchange relationships with other organizational actors (Granovetter, 1985; Dyer, & Singh, 1998; Gulati et al., 2000; Zaheer, Gozubuyuk, & Milanov, 2010).

This latter theoretical perspective originates from the network theory, which has a rich history in both social sciences (e.g., Granovetter, 1973; Borgatti, & Halgin, 2011) as well as business research (e.g., Burt, 1992; Hoang, & Antoncic, 2003). The importance of this perspective lies in its ability to better understand the behavior of organizational actors through applying a deepened focus on the structured network of relationships in which they are embedded (Gulati et al., 2000).

The embeddedness perspective, also dubbed the problem of embeddedness, claims that organizational actors are both facilitated and constrained by networks of linkages (i.e., the configuration of ties and relationships) in which they are embedded, and that since these networks are highly diversified, organizations thus vary in the way they act in relation to information and resources within their particular network (Granovetter, 1985; Gulati et al., 2000; Borgatti, & Halgin, 2011). This theoretical perspective, in other words, suggests that because organizations are constrained within networks, and because these networks have different configurations of both information and resources, there is a difference in the way organizations have access to, are able to discover, as well as act upon chances for competitive organizational capabilities via such networks (Gulati et al., 2000).

6.3.1 Network theory and interorganizational collaboration
In the past, scholars originating from both economic and social sciences have studied the implications of network theory for interorganizational behavior (i.e., action) (Gulati, 1999; Zaheer et al., 2010). According to Gulati et al. (2000), strategic networks encompass a firm’s
set of relationships with other organizations, including relationships across industries.

According to Granovetter (1985), organizations are both facilitated as well as constrained by the network they are embedded in, and this network moreover, has a direct influence on the organizations’ actions and interests. Furthermore, Hardy et al. (2003) state that “the most significant aspect of an organizations’ environment is the set of other organizations with which it interacts and the pattern of relationships among them.” Such networks, as Gulati et al. (2000) state, can “potentially provide a firm with access to information, resources, markets, and technologies (…) with advantages from learning, scale, and scope economies (…) and allow firms to achieve strategic objectives.”

Following the above line of reasoning, the incentives for organizations to form collaborative, strategic relationships within their network, accrue from the possibility to obtain resources and capabilities that they themselves do not possess and which they cannot develop internally (Gulati, & Gargiulo, 1999). Through forming interfim linkages, the organizations’ network is leveraged as an additional resource that can be utilized in order to cope with the uncertainties posed by environmental forces beyond an organizations’ direct control (Gulati, 1999; Gulati, & Gargiulo, 1999). According to Gulati et al. (2000), the supposed strategic importance of an organizations’ network is enhanced by the economic environment as it becomes increasingly more competitive.

6.4 Integrated theoretical framework
This study integrates the theoretical concepts of both the resource-based view of the firm as well as social network theory in order to disclose their joint rationale for interorganizational collaboration.

According to the RBV, the formation of interfim linkages is a feasible way to overcome the obstacle of obtaining critical resources that may take a long time to develop and may require firm-specific capabilities to develop. Moreover, these particular linkages can potentially provide organizations with a source of competitive advantage over competing firms who are unable or unwilling to form such interfim linkages (Hamel et al., 1989; Dyer, & Singh, 1998; Hardy et al., 2003).
The embeddedness perspective, in addition, focusses on the critical aspect of an organizations’ network. It concentrates on the importance of cooperative relationships with other organizations because it acknowledges that in order to gain a competitive advantage over other organizations and to ultimately accomplish organizational success is not so much determined by the direct control of resources, but rather by the set of resources that organizational actors are able to mobilize through their particular set of social relationships (Galaskiewicz, 1979). A highly important issue concerning the network approach is the theory itself does not necessarily provide a theoretical lens (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, & Labianca, 2009). In relation to this issue, Zaheer et al. (2010), note that it is therefore “incumbent on the researcher to provide an explanation of the underlying process”.

Since organizational actors are both facilitated and constrained by the networks in which they are socially embedded, and since forming collaborative ties with other organizational actors not only extends the firms network, but additionally allows firms to gain access to more distant resources that can create value for the firm, the choice to seek for alternative networks and thus interfirm collaborative linkages in this light is understood as an organization’s direct response to the shortage of information and recourses within their direct organizational network (Gulati et al., 2000; Zaheer et al., 2010). Furthermore, since the mobilization of embedded resources and information provides organizations with a potential means of gaining a competitive advantage over those organizations that are unwilling or unable to form such interfirm linkages, the formation of interfirm linkages thus provides firms the basis for strategic advantage (Gulati et al., 2000).

6.5 Interorganizational collaboration through Trade Association membership
Organizations that are together associated within the structure of a specific TA are linked to organizations that have a comparable background and similar business interests. There are numerous business sectors, subsectors and even subsectors of subsectors differentiated within the scope of the economy\(^8\). Since the market coverage of TA representation for these different sectors at the same time seems to be just as plentiful\(^9\), the choice of membership therefore, in accordance with Bennett (1999), will be “explicable through its costs and benefits and the market conditions prevailing on the individual business and the sector of which it is a part”.


\(^9\) http://pyttersen.bsl.nl/Brancheorganisaties

Social media: friend or foe?
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6.5.1 Benefits of collaboration through Trade Associations

In accordance with the work of various authors (Schmitter, & Streeck, 1981; Boléat, 1996; Bennett, 2000; Rademakers, 2000; Tack, & Beusmans, 2001; Schmidt et al., 2003; Bennet, & Robson, 2011), below are presented six of the most significant functions TAs are able to offer its members. In relation to the integrated theoretical concept, the below functions reflect the various motives for organizations to engage in interorganizational collaboration via TAs. These functions will serve as the primary basis of comparison between TAs and SM, and will thus be of great value when ultimately providing an answer to the central research question.

a) Networking function
A key trait of TAs, is providing networking functionalities to its members. TAs have a crucial role in connecting independent organizational actors, such as member organizations, suppliers and government actors, and in addition they allow for the interorganizational transfer of knowledge and exchange of resources. TAs thus can be leveraged by member organizations as an extension of their existing set of interorganizational ties and linkages, thus allowing them to gain distant information and resources, key to gaining a potential competitive advantage.

b) Advisory and consultative services
One of the most important activities of TAs is to provide its members with diverse types of information and advice (Boléat, 2003). TA members are looking for information and advice that they are unable to assemble individually due to, for instance, time constraints and a possible lack of specialist knowledge. TAs are in a unique position to inform organizations on, for instance, applicable laws and legislation, specific information regarding appropriate governance and business organization, but also on statistics and analysis regarding the industry (Boléat, 2003). TA membership can thus be utilized by individual organizations in order to extend their current capacity to access this particular kind of information.

c) Self-regulation
This functionality reflects both the authority and autonomy of the TA as an organizational entity. Self-regulation can exist in addition to existing government regulation, or can emerge as a reaction to the lack of government regulation, and can be instated in order to, for example, promote a general code of conduct and specific quality standards and labels. A very
important aspect of self-regulation is its voluntary characteristics, as member organizations volunteer to be subject to regulation which is typically not required by government law (Boléat, 2003). Self-regulation allows organizations to safeguard their individual interests by taking collective action. This latter part holds the important notion that organizations via TA membership are able to connect and, collectively, act, whereas without this network of independent organizations, they would have been unable to do so.

d) Representative and lobbying function
Individual companies in general are not able to directly influence their environment. There is a large number of potential threats and uncertainties that organizations face. Apart from competitive forces, firms may face uncertainties related to for example government legislation, and although they might want to encounter and influence different stakeholders, organizations oftentimes have a sheer lack of knowledge, resources and appropriate network linkages in order to do so. The TA in this respect can act as a catalyst for collective, action, and by means of TA membership, individual organizations are represented collectively towards important (political) stakeholders and can thus benefit from this cooperation.

e) Providing a sense of belonging
Apart from business motives, a TA is also able to offer bonding possibilities on a social level. Membership organizations are motivated and encouraged by a sense of belonging and interconnectedness by means of for example planned meetings and conferences for TA members. This function arguably acts as the oil that allows the motor to continue running, and through providing its members with a sense of belonging, organizations are perhaps more likely to share information and collaborate on important matters. Individual organizations are able to establish connections to likeminded actors that they maybe would have never located without leveraging the services and network of the TA.

f) Internal organizing function
TA Member organizations are oftentimes able to benefit from various alternative services, such as collective insurance, training or specialized courses, group discounts et cetera, that are based on economies of scale. Individually, firms may lack the knowledge and resources to locate for example specialized training practices, also, they might not have the appropriate network to profit from collective discounts. Via TA membership, organizational are thus
provided with the right interorganizational connections that enable a possibility to benefit collectively.

In summary, the above functions show that TAs can form an important structure for the exchange of resources, and to expand the network of member organizations allowing them to access embedded knowledge and information. Additionally, member organizations of a TA are offered supplementary individual benefits that cohere with collective membership.

6.5.2 Costs of collaboration through Trade Associations

As mentioned earlier, the balance between the cost of membership and the benefits, logically should tilt towards the benefits. The benefits of TA membership in other words, need to outweigh the costs, as organizations will otherwise choose to exit (i.e., lapse) (Bennett, 1999). Although the presented reasoning behind interorganizational collaborative relationships seems obvious, and the advantages clear cut, cooperative relationships with other organizations however, can also be problematic and costly (e.g., Eisenhardt, & Schoonhoven, 1996; Lorenzoni, & Lipparini, 1999).

Following the available literature on the logic of TA membership, there are different types of costs involved in the previously mentioned consideration. Primarily, there are direct costs as member organizations on the one hand face subscription fees, and are on the other hand required to invest time and effort, in order to maintain the collaboration, and ultimately gain from it. Secondary, there are those costs that can potentially stem from interorganizational collaboration in general.

Interfirm networks namely, have a potential to lock organizations into unproductive relationships or hinder partnering with other viable firms (Gulati et al., 2000). Moreover, the opportunities for linkage formation with other organizations may not always be available (e.g., Hamel et al., 1989). Moreover, literature on TAs, as well as on strategic alliance formation and collaboration in general mentions such costs as search costs, bargaining costs, and free-riding and opportunistic behavior (Bennett, 1999; Gulati, 1999; Bennett, & Ramsden, 2007).

Vlaar, Van Dam, De Gunst, & Derksen (2006) mention several disadvantages of
interorganizational collaboration in more detail. According to these authors Vlaar et al., 2006), interorganizational collaboration can for instance: disrupt important business operations, as the time spent on the collaborative partnership, cannot be spent on other processes; lead to additional overhead costs as the partnership may require additional control; induce relationship-specific investments that enable sharing firm-specific knowledge, yet upon termination of the collaboration, invested resources will become obsolete (i.e., wasted); lead to knowledge leakage and the ultimate loss of core competencies, as opportunistic behavior may appear amongst partner firms.

6.6 Interorganizational collaboration through Social Media participation
Different scholars emphasize the importance for organizations to participate in SM (Tapscott, & Williams, 2006; Qualman, 2009; Safko, 2010). According to Tapscott (2006), collaboration through means of SM is the new foundation of competitiveness, given that it enables and supports collaboration not only within the enterprise, but also, more importantly, with external business partners and stakeholders.

In an attempt to provide an explanation to the central research question, the purpose of the following paragraphs is twofold. First, it will investigate to what extent the benefits and costs of interorganizational collaboration through SM can be compared to the benefits and costs of interorganizational collaboration through TAs. Second, in doing so, it will be possible to provide certain assumptions on the possibility of SM to challenge the viability of interorganizational collaboration through TAs.

6.6.1 Benefits of collaboration through Social Media
Based on scholarly findings it is attempted here to structure the benefits of engaging in collaboration via SM by making use of a comparative assessment approach. Also, there is presented a conservative presumption, based on scholarly findings. As noted before, these functions will form the primary basis of comparison between TAs and SM, and thus also for the subsequent answer to the central research question.

a) Networking function
SM, Like TAs, offers its participants with a potential network of interconnected social actors. In using SM, participants are able to form highly diversified linkages through which they are able to collaborate with multiple disconnected networks all at the same time (Hansen et al.,
2010). Furthermore, SM allow users to take advantage of these connections in order to obtain various different resources and diversified information (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010). Linkages to external networks function as ultra-efficient information channels between the participating organization and other network members (Burt, 1992; Houghton, Smith, & Hood, 2009).

Through collaborating via SM organizations are, as mentioned above, able to obtain diverse resources from other diverse sources, regardless of time and place. Although the networking functionalities together with the embedded knowledge at this point in time may be just not specialized and concentrated enough to fully challenge knowledge intensive TAs, there is however a huge potential in SM as a provider of networking functionalities to its participants.

b) Advisory and consultative services
In collaborating through SM, organizations and organizational actors gain access to different types of advice and consultation. According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), specialized business models for example, evolve at high speed through collaborative projects, potentially providing its creators with a competitive edge over other organizations. A determining success factor of SM would be the openness and transparency of the available information and resources (Mayfield, 2008). Participants will be able to find information, inspiration, and collaborators and together can develop new ideas and services faster than ever before (Mayfield, 2008).

Although the fact that SM offers open and transparent structures for participants to gather advice and consultation, the potential of SM to fully challenge TAs in this area is presumably too scanty, especially in comparison to the highly specialized and sector-specific knowledge portrayed and accumulated over time by TAs.

c) Self-regulation
No literature has been found that calls attention to this particular topic. Self-regulation is a field in which SM have yet to prove their value. According to Kietzmann, Silvestre, McCarthy, & Pitt (2012), SM have a tremendous impact on how people behave online. The authors describe in detail the online behavior of both individuals and groups, and claim, in accordance with social identity theory, that in-group and out-group behavior can be observed in the online context (Kietzmann et al., 2012). These findings may implicate that for instance a code of conduct can emerge in a particular domain or sub-domain. The extent to which SM
will be able to instate rules and regulation that will be widely accepted, however, remains uncertain.

Yet, according to Kietzmann et al. (2012), SM does have a tremendous impact on how people behave online. The authors describe in detail the online behavior of both individuals and groups, and claim, in accordance with social identity theory, that in-group and out-group behavior can be observed in online context (Kietzmann et al., 2012). These findings may implicate that for instance a code of conduct can emerge in a particular domain or subdomain.

d) Representative and lobbying function
Dedicated lobbies are initiated in order to both directly and indirectly influence the different stakeholders that surround a specific topic of interest, and in doing so, representing the joint interests of a particular business sector (Bennett, & Robson, 2011). According to the work of Shirky (2011), the networked population is gaining greater access to information over time, and with it, not only will more opportunities to engage in public speech be presented to them, the ability to undertake collective action will also be enhanced.

Effective lobbying requires specialized techniques which are generally developed over time and are present in almost all contemporary TAs. Although SM offers a large set of tools for such activities as the sharing of information amongst different social actors, the fostering of discussions of interest groups and also for achieving the necessary reach over different channels, the success of lobbying via SM remains doubtful. In addition, the SM phenomenon is of relatively short age and the answer to the question whether SM are able to challenge TAs on this particular function thus remains somewhat unclear.

e) Providing a sense of belonging
One of the features that truly make SM social, is the fact that it is represented entirely by social actors. All the networks that exist on SM are created and maintained based on human interactions. In general, numerous networks connect like-minded actors to each other and in doing so, they guide people to those places and contexts where they not only find, but can also discuss and actually become part of the things that matter to them and their environment.

The large number of online gatherings of individuals, whether it is on a forum, or a social
networking site, seems to indicate that SM offers a sense of belonging of considerable importance to its participants and suggests that SM can truly challenge the specific TA offering.

f) Internal organizing function

As there are within the TA context, there are dedicated areas within the realm of SM that allow participants to benefit from services such as training or courses, and other collective gains. In an effort to map the collaborative use of SM in higher education contexts for example, Dabbagh, & Kitsantas (2012) not only found that students integrated SM in their general academic experience, but also that SM are becoming increasingly utilized by college faculty staff in order to enhance both teaching and learning activities as a whole. Moreover, as cited from the work of Andriole (2010): “Third-party training and education providers will leverage Web 2.0 technologies, integrating them into the already substantial online training and education industry”.

The above implies that SM and its various accompanied tools may potentially challenge TAs when it comes to training and learning potential. Although there was no material found on the impact of SM when it comes to profiting from shared services such as a collective insurance, it makes sense to argue that SM users promote (like) and share services (or service providers) that they favor, like for example pleasing and advantageous deals (Safko, 2010).

6.6.2 Costs of collaboration through Social Media

Although the territory of SM is not as demarcated as is the case with TAs, SM participation too, has its specific costs and disadvantages. First, like with TAs, there needs to be made some kind of investment of both time and effort in order to become engaged in collaboration by means of SM. The largest difference with TA membership in terms of costs probably lies in the fact that SM allow organizations and social actors to participate at relatively low cost as well as a high level of efficiency (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010). Yet, using SM can be more costly than one might expect, as the true potential is difficult to assess (Safko, 2010). In order to reap the benefits of SM, organizations need to fully understand how to optimally use the various tools and that process may require quite some resources.

In addition, there are some clear downsides to the participation in interorganizational
collaboration through the use of SM. First, SM have a particular set of regulatory challenges, as for instance authorship is difficult to determine, sources are rarely provided, and users are able to post personal opinions as comments (Vance, Howe, & Dellavalle, 2009). Second, some scholars argue that although SM enable access to information sources all over the planet, there is a potential for disruptions in the behavioral and relational context as the on and offline worlds grow closer every day (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010).

6.7 Porter and the threat of substitutes
Taking in regard the widely respected theory of Porter (2008) on substitutes, the potential substitute needs to perform in the same or a similar way as the currently established concept in order to form an actual substitute. Additionally, the substitute should offer an attractive cost/benefit prospect compared to the established concept and, also, the switching cost to the substitute should be relatively low (Porter, 2008).

The characteristics of the increasingly popular SM phenomenon seem to overlap some of the key functions of TAs. In order to cope with strategic complexity for example, organizations require highly diverse knowledge inputs (Houghton, Smith, & Hood, 2009). Since organizations are able to connect with different networks and are able to obtain associated knowledge and resources via SM collaboration, it can be argued that SM are able to challenge TAs and could thus be regarded as substitution in accordance with Porters (2008) work.

There are, however, certain domains such as self-regulation and lobbying that seem to remain untouched by SM. Therefore, the general tendency of the general motives for interorganizational collaboration in the presented theoretical framework, along with the benefits and costs of collaborative behavior by way of TAs membership and SM participation do not hint towards full substitution of TAs by SM. In order to determine if SM are complementary towards, rather than a substitute for TAs, the current study will conduct subsequent analysis of collected data samples.

7 Methodology
A detailed overview of the methodological considerations and data collection process will be presented in the following paragraphs. The research philosophy and approach, the methodological fit and the research design will for instance be highlighted in order to
emphasize its relevance in contemporary academic research. Later on, the design for data sampling is clarified and connected with the previously formulated theoretical framework.

7.1 Research philosophy
In line with both theoretical concepts presented in the conceptual framework, the current study argues that the underlying motives for interorganizational collaborative behavior cannot be exclusively explained by reducing its complexity entirely to a sequence of law-like generalizations. Taking an interpretivist stance, it is argued that the complex world of business and management in general is profoundly complex as it is shaped by multiple interconnected social actors. Moreover, as stated by Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009), an interpretivist perspective is applicable particularly in the field of organizational behavioral research.

7.2 Research approach
Academic research in general is known to have two strongly demarcated research approaches, being the deductive and the inductive research approach (Saunders et al., 2009). Since it is the aim of the current qualitative study to collect data and develop theory as a result of the data analysis, the research approach has an inductive nature (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Edmondson, & McManus (2007), the contribution of this type of research lies in its ability to provide “a suggestive theory of the phenomenon that shapes the basis for further inquiry”.

This interpretation of inductive analysis is in accordance with the definition by Strauss, & Corbin (1998), who emphasize that when engaging in inductive, qualitative research, it is important to allow theory to emerge from the collected data. In the ability to allow research findings to emerge from raw data, this study not only avoids the restraints that are imposed by structured methodologies, but moreover, allows for a more flexible research structure (Thomas, 2006; Saunders et al., 2009).

7.3 Methodological fit
In their research, Edmondson, & McManus (2007) stress that the state of prior knowledge and theory is a key determinant of appropriate research methodology. The implementation of research techniques, such as interviews, requires a proper methodological fit, as it is obvious that not all techniques are appropriate for all situations (Edmondson, & McManus, 2007).
Methodological fit is defined by Edmondson, & McManus (2007) as the internal consistency among the various elements of a research project (i.e., research question, research design, previous studies, and theoretical input). Moreover, the degree in which methodological fit is achieved, depends on the conditions of the theory at the time the research is conducted (e.g., nascent, intermediate or mature) (Edmondson, & McManus, 2007).

Edmondson, & McManus (2007) characterize nascent theory research as those areas of research where there is little or no existing theory available, mainly because there has not yet been much research or formal theorizing to date, or because the area of research is represented by a rather new phenomenon. Since the strategic impact of SM in the field of interorganizational collaboration is a new area of research, and since up until now little prior theory has been developed in relation to this subject, the current state of the theory, following the work of Edmondson, & McManus (2007), is nascent.

As outlined earlier, the inductive approach of the current study aims at theory development and also at the development of a better understanding of strategic organizational behavior. It is therefore important that the research technique used fits with this type of exploratory research. According to Edmondson, & McManus (2007), “rich, detailed, and evocative data are needed to shed light on the phenomenon”, as there is a theory yet to be formalized. Building on their clear assertion, this study will make use of interviews as its core research technique in an attempt to allow theory to emerge from its findings.

7.4 Scientific credibility
In order to perform a sound analysis and ultimately draw credible conclusions from the collected data, it is vital that the design of the research, as well as the execution of the interviews were performed adequately. The credibility of scientific research is closely related to both the concepts of validity and reliability and to determine the credibility of a specific study, it is key to assess its reliability and validity.

7.4.1 Reliability
According to (Sekaran, 2003), research is reliable only in case another researcher, while applying the same procedures and while studying the same phenomenon, arrives at similar, or
considerably comparable findings. Reliability in other words, thus means the extent to which the outcomes of the study are consistent over time and also the extent to which the research can be reproduced by applying a similar methodology.

Robson (2002) differentiates between four potential threats to a study’s reliability, namely: subject or participant error, subject or participant bias, observer error, and observer bias. In order to reduce subject or participant error, the research subjects (i.e., participants) have been studied in situations that are consistent with their normal behavioral context (Saunders et al., 2009). Furthermore, participants were ensured anonymity in order to limit the inaccurate, socially desirable responses and thus reducing subject or participant bias. Observer error and observer bias was already low since all interviews were conducted by the same researcher, and was further lowered by planning a maximum of two interviews per day and thus prevent systematic errors for instance because of tiredness (Saunders et al., 2009).

7.4.2 Validity

As mentioned above, the second important factor to determine a study’s credibility, is the validity. According to Saunders et al. (2009), research is valid when it actually studies what it was originally set out to study (i.e., internal validity), and furthermore only if its outcomes are verifiable (i.e., external validity).

The importance of the internal consistency and internal validity of a particular study seems obvious. Yet, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is unstructured and is strongly centralized on analyzing and understanding the researched context. Therefore, with qualitative research, it sometimes remains difficult to determine to what extent findings can be related back to the interventions of the research, rather than just being an outcome of flaws in the research design (Saunders et al., 2009).

Although the accessibility of participants and the level of detail is relatively high, one of the known limitations of using interviews as a source for data collection is its low statistical validity and therefore moderate generalizability (Currall, & Towler, 2003). Achieving high external validity thus, will be more difficult to establish with this type of data collection. The current study however, has intended to counter this limitation through the presentation of the preliminary results to the participants in order to determine if the results are accurate.
7.5 Research method choice
Two truly distinct types of data collection techniques are oftentimes mentioned in literature, namely the quantitative and the qualitative technique (e.g., Saunders et al., 2009). Quantitative research and data collecting techniques in general, focus more on collecting numeric data through for example structured questionnaires, and are mostly structured in such a way that allows researchers to reach the highest possible levels of objectivity, generalizability, and reliability (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research however, recognizes great importance in acknowledging the social complexity of the studied phenomenon, and relies on interviews as its main source for data collection (Creswell, 2003).

Due to the characteristics of the current study, as well as the nascent state of the theory, qualitative interviews were adopted as the primary source of data collection. Given the limited time horizon of the current study, a cross-sectional design was applied. Within the boundaries of the cross-sectional research design, data was thus collected via mono method, semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2009).

7.6 Qualitative sampling and data collection
In line with the explorative outlines of this study, there has not been drawn an explicit sampling frame and the sample thus was selected non-randomly (Saunders et al., 2009). Non-random sampling (also referred to as non-probability sampling) can best be explained as a way of sampling where the chance (or probability) of a specific case being selected is unknown (Saunders et al., 2009). This technique is oftentimes associated with qualitative research, as the quality and richness of the data outweighs the need for the sample to be representative and its outcomes to be generalizable (Patton, 2002). In his work, Patton (2002) highlights accordingly that the sample size should be large enough to be credible, yet small enough to assure a sufficient depth and detail of the researched phenomenon.

This study embedded the above insights and selected those cases that allowed best for answering the research questions, and in doing so, it applied a purposive sampling technique Patton (2002). As the purpose of this study is ultimately situated in examining the extent to which SM can replace other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as TAs, the selected cases thus had to reflect the characteristics of the concepts of both SM and TAs.
Originally, the idea was to conduct interviews with ten employees of ten different companies which were known to be engaged into SM usage. There would be two equal groups of participants where one group would represent TA members and one group would represent TA non-members. However, as the first couple of interviews were conducted, this design was however abandoned, as the interviews with TA members proved to contribute significantly more interesting and deepened findings. These participants were for instance better able to grasp the concept of TAs and could therefore provide a more sophisticated comparison to the concept of SM.

This approach ultimately resulted in six interviews being arranged with participants who were known to be using SM as a professional tool and were also known to be a member of a particular TA; three interviews being arranged with participants who were known to be using SM as a professional tool and were also known not to be a member of a particular TA; and one interview specially being conducted with a participant who was employed by a leading Dutch software and consultancy company, that has developed various professional SM and SM content management tools that are used by several TAs in the Netherlands. This interview was supposed to provide specialist background information on the current and future state of SM solutions for the professional use of the TA.

7.6.1 Research population

Participants were selected based on specific characteristics. Aside from the fact that all respondents utilized SM as a professional tool, and the fact that six of the respondents were linked as a member to TAs, several additional choices have been made in regard to the demarcation of the final research population of this research.

First, the business sector chosen was that of business services. This choice was based on the increased importance of business services in terms of innovation and the development of highly specialized knowledge, together with the rapid growth of employment in this sector (Linders, 2012). Additionally, while innovative activities within the service sector as a whole have increased over the past twenty years, business services especially, are recognized as one of the main drivers behind technical changes and economic development Czarnitzki, & Spielkamp (2003). The business services sector thus fulfills a key role in the contemporary economy that is becoming increasingly knowledge-based. The sector includes a wide range of
both professional- as well as support services\textsuperscript{10} and according to Linders (2012) it covers “knowledge-intensive and creative professional services (such as management consultancy, design activities, marketing services and architectural and engineering services) and IT services”.

The second choice in the further demarcation of the research population was one that was made based on the actual size of the organization (i.e., the number of people employed by a company). Large organizations, as Hultén, Barron, & Bryson (2012) point out, have fewer need for collaboration via TAs, as they usually have a larger amount of resources available at their expense, therefore the focus of this research is on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). SMEs namely, are confronted with resource constraints to a greater extent than large corporates are and, in accordance with the previously presented theory, will be more likely to engage in various forms of interorganizational collaboration (Hultén et al., 2012.).

Additionally, the economic impact of SMEs on the contemporary European markets (e.g., Linders, 2012), together with the notion that for the Netherlands alone, no less than 99.0% of all companies fall within the SME category\textsuperscript{11}, have been important factors in bringing the focus of this study to these specific companies.

7.6.2 Measures
The better part of the articles that were used to shape the preliminary literature review, the later development of the theoretical framework, and ultimately, the design of the interviews, originate from leading academic journals based on ISI Journal Citation Reports\textsuperscript{12}. This widely recognized authority for evaluating academic journals assures the significance of the addressed literature and also adds to the acceptance and trustworthiness of the current study.

Within these journals, extensive scholarly research has been published on strategic organizational behavior, such as collaboration perspectives, alliance formation, resource constraints, and embedded social networks. Additionally, numerous articles were observed that have been written in the theoretical field of TAs in general, and the related motives and rationale for engaging in interorganizational collaboration in particular. Because the concept

\textsuperscript{11} http://www.mkbservicedesk.nl/569/informatie-over-midden-kleinbedrijf-nederland.htm#
\textsuperscript{12} http://thomsonreuters.com/products_services/science/science_products/a-z/journal_citation_reports/
of SM are fairly new, as is the available research on its perspectives for collaboration on a professional scale, the theoretical material found in scholarly journals was rather limited. However, a fair amount of books dedicated to academic literature proved to be very useful.

Due to the fact that prior work in the range of the current study was limited, the interviews have been constructed first hand. Taking in regard the exploratory characteristics of the current study, and also in order to reduce potential interviewer bias, non-standardized, semi-structured interviews have been conducted (Cooper, & Schindler, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009). In order to be best able to collect data from the complex and open-ended questions and also to allow minor variations in the particular order and logic of the questions, all interviews have been conducted on a face-to-face basis (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008).

7.6.3 Qualitative data collection

In general, the Dutch city region of Amsterdam (i.e., Groot Amsterdam) was selected as the area of focus because of the high density in both TAs as well as SMEs. For those interviews that had participants who were known to be using SM as a professional tool and were also known to be a member of a particular TA, e-mails have been sent out to 90 unique respondents, that together represented 90 unique companies that held a membership in 1 of a total of 6 different TAs. These TAs were all operating in the advisory, media and communications sub-sector of the business services sector. In relation to the earlier presented TA categorization, specialized associations have been selected (i.e., TAs that exist within industry associations and may, for example, comprise particular sizes of organization or companies in a particular region (Boléat, 1996)). The TAs that have been selected are, in no particular order: VETRON (n=20), Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) (n=15), Platform Internet Bureaus Nederland (n=15), VEA (n=15), MWG (n=10), and PMA (n=15).

Although the total percentage of responses (20.0%) in this group was quite satisfactory, the percentage of respondents that were willing to participate was actually lower (11.1%). This, because six respondents refused to participate as they had no time to participate, two participants claimed to be out of the scope of the research as their organization just had

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13 http://www.kvk.nl/ondernemen/brancheinformatie/branchewijzer/
cancelled the TA membership, and two participants could not be contacted and thus resulted in a loss of sample.

For those interviews that had participants who were known to be using SM as a professional tool and were also known not to be a member of a particular TA, e-mails have been sent out to 12 unique members of a total of six different companies that were all operating in the business sector similar to the one mentioned above.

Out of the total of 12 emails sent, 33.3% of the respondents replied. The total percentage of participants in this group was fairly high, at 25.0%. Two respondents refused to participate due to time constraints.

7.7 Interview guide
According to Field, & Morse (1992), problems related to the validity, reliability, and meaningfulness of the data can occur when conducting the interviews in the interviewer’s work area (e.g., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). Therefore, the choice was made to conduct the interviews on a location chosen by the participants, as this may lead to a higher degree of objectiveness in terms of the observation (Field, & Morse, 1992).

Before the interview took place, the participant was thanked for his/her participation in the study, the agreed right to confidentiality was formally stressed, and the request to record the interview with approval of the participant was made. Next, in order to gain objective observations, the interviewee was briefed on both the basic outline of the structure and purpose of the research, and also on the role of the researcher (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Additionally, he/she was provided with a brief description of the concepts of TAs, SM, and interorganizational collaboration, based on the definitions practiced in the present study. Also, the relation between the various concepts was outlined.

The participant was asked to describe in what way he/she was familiar with the theoretical concepts. Moreover, he/she was asked to illustrate his/her basic understanding of the theoretical concepts. Furthermore, the participant was asked to provide real life examples of interorganizational collaboration between the organization in which he/she worked and an alternative organization. The participant was then asked to what extent the company he/she
worked in was engaged in collaboration via TAs, SM, or both and what he/she considered to be key factors in these forms of collaboration.

The interviews took approximately one hour to finalize, and as mentioned above, were audio taped after the participant gave his/her explicit approval. All interviews were recorded in order to remain as a permanent record for others to use (Saunders et al., 2009). The choice to record the interviews, furthermore, was made not only because it allows for careful transcription and data analysis, but also because it ensures that the data remains unbiased and accurate (Saunders et al., 2009).

Although there were two distinct groups of participants (i.e., TA members and non-TA members), the interviews followed a similar design. This because the variation in membership versus non-membership was considered to be a potentially explaining factor in organizational behavior, such as interorganizational collaboration. The outline of the interview with the participant working for a Dutch software and consultancy company, however, did have a different structure, as the interview was meant to provide a detailed insight into the market conditions and the possibilities regarding interorganizational collaboration. This particular interview, therefore, was enriched with a number of questions dedicated to the described additional topics. The interview protocols can be found in appendices five and six.

7.8 Research ethics

Research ethics is an important, yet sometimes obscured component of scientific research. Research ethics relates to questions about how we formulate and clarify our research topic, design our research and gain access, collect data, process and store data, analyze data and write up our research findings in a moral and responsible way (Saunders et al., 2009).

General issues that are potentially existent in a particular scientific research project are for instance related to the privacy of participants, the handling and confidentiality of the data provided by participants and their anonymity and the behavior and objectivity of the researcher involved (Saunders et al., 2009). Since the current study makes use of interviews as its source for data collection, and as this approach to research is known to have a larger potential for ethical issues to occur (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008), certain considerations were made to ensure compliance with ethical research principles.
First, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was ensured in order to fend them from any possible harm or stress that the research could bring to the participant (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Second, feedback on the interviews was incorporated, therefore allowing participants to stress possible concerns et cetera (Saunders et al., 2009). Third, absolute assurance regarding the storage and use of the collected data was given to establish trust towards the participants (Saunders et al., 2009).

8 Analysis
Below, the process of data analysis and the use of the professional data analysis tools and techniques will be presented.

8.1 Data analysis preparation
As the interviews have been audio taped and since audio files do not allow for the most structured analysis, all of the audio fragments were converted into a text transcript (Saunders et al., 2009). Additionally, in order to enhance the quality and credibility of the results and research in general, the transcribed data was then coded (Yin, 2003). The coding process was done with the use of ATLAS.ti, a widely utilized and respected research tool that allows scholars to be better able to systematically analyze and explore collected data that originates from qualitative data sources, such as semi-structured interviews (Lewins, & Silver, 2006).

8.2 Data categorization and coding
In order to be able to draw conclusions from the collected data, it is necessary to first categorize the data. According to Saunders et al. (2009), the process of data categorization generally involves two important activities, being the category development and subsequent categorization of data fragments. The technique that was used to derive names for the different categories and themes, followed the work of Strauss, & Corbin (2008), whom state that terms can emerge from the data, can be based on the actual terms used by the participants, and can be derived from terms used in available theory and academic literature.

The associated data coding process consisted of four consecutive steps. During the first step, open coding was applied in order to cluster the different data fragments into the general themes that correspond to the key themes that have been introduced earlier in the present study and have also been incorporated as such into the interviews: interorganizational
collaboration, TAs, and SM. The second step consisted of linking additional data fragments to the sub-themes that consist of the key functions of a TA that have been distinguished in the theoretical section of this study. The sub-themes are: Networking function; Advisory and consultative services; Self-regulation; Representative and lobbying function; Providing a sense of belonging; and Internal organizing function. During the third step, data fragments such as past-present and present-future trends, as well as cost/benefit statements were linked to those themes that have been included in the interview, but were not directly related to the main themes of this research. The fourth step contained the process of linking the remaining data fragments to those themes that were not necessarily specified in this research, nor have been deliberately included in the interview. Here, those fragments have been included that relate to sector and organization specific statements.

9 Results
The following subsections will provide an overview of the data that has been collected via the interviews. First, the participant profile and their respective organizations will be put forward. Additionally, the various participant experiences with the themes constructed in relation to the previously defined theoretical concepts and interview questions will be presented.

To assure discretion of the results and to ensure the anonymity of the participants, the presented data fragments and quotations are referenced via a unique participant code that consists of the appropriate group (e.g., TA, or NTA), the participants number (e.g., NTA-P-1), and if applicable the quotation order (e.g., NTA-P-1a).

9.1 Participant profile
In general, all participants were native speakers of Dutch. Eight of the participants were male, whereas two were female. Out of the six participants that were selected to represent the TA members, five participants confirmed that their organization indeed had a membership with at least one TA. One participant explained that although his company had been a TA member for five years, they recently decided to cancel the membership. The company of the specialist participant turned out to also be a member of a TA. The three participants that were selected to represent the non-TA members, all stated that their organization indeed was not a TA member at the time of the research.
The familiarity of the participants with SM applications, in terms of adoption and usage within a business context, provided the following outcomes: (micro)Blogs, such as Twitter (n=8), and blogging communities (n=4); social networking sites, such as Facebook (n=6), Google Circles (n=3), LinkedIn (n=9), and Xing (n=2); Collaborative projects, such as Bootcamp (n=1), Google Circles (n=3), and Wiki’s (n=1); Content aggregators, such as E-newsletters (n=1), and Mashable (n=1); and Forums (n=1).

The average company size was reported to be 56 employees and ranged in size from 5 to 200. Four respondents also gave an indication of the sector size in which their company was operating, finding in one occasion (nTA-P-2) that the number of companies to be operating in the sector was relatively small at around 10 companies, and in three occasions (nTA-P-2, TA-P-6, & NTA-P-9) relatively large ranging roughly from 200 to 1,000+ companies.

The role of the participants within their organization was that of strategy consultant (n=1), founder/owner and managing director (n= 3), managing director (n= 3), online marketing professional (n=1), SEO-specialist (n=1), and commercial director (n=1). Additionally, one participant (TA-P-6) was also enrolled as financial director within a TA, and one participant (TA-P-7) stated that to have been enrolled in the past as chairman of the board of directors of a TA for five years.

9.2 Interorganizational collaboration
When asked to think of, and if possible also describe, an example of interorganizational collaboration, all participants were able to provide at least one example. Five participants underlined the role of interorganizational collaboration in regard to gaining a better means to service the customer. For instance, one participant commented: “We already have a lot of knowledge present in-house, but when we need access to specialized knowledge to better serve a customer, we will for example collaborate with other companies” (TA-P-5a). In line with this statement, a different participant answered: “In case we do not have the knowledge to create [a movie clip] for the client, I am able to get this knowledge from other organizations” (nTA-P-2a).

Additionally, three participants mentioned that the reason for them to engage into interfirm collaboration was to strengthen their long-term knowledge and shared capabilities. As one participant stated: “We oftentimes collaborate in order to strengthen our position in the
Participants were also asked to comment on the structure of the collaborative relations. Almost half of the participants stated that collaboration occurred only within a strongly structured context. One participant for instance noted: “Together with three other labels, we are part of […], and because of this structure, we are able to both work autonomously and also collectively. This allows us to offer a suitable proposition to the client” (TA-P-5b). Four participants explained more flexible structures of collaboration. Oftentimes mentioned were such terms as ad-hoc cooperation and an opportunistic form of collaboration. One of those participants for instance remarks: “It is a process of trial and error, you need to test it in order to see if it works and if it does, then you continue to collaborate” (TA-P-7a).

A lack of structure for collaboration was also explicitly mentioned by two of the participants. The participants claim that the lack of structure and formalization in their collaborative encounters can potentially lead to a failure to leverage certain resources.

9.2.1 Strategic complexity
A different point of view towards interorganizational collaboration was also documented, as three participants pointed out the strategic complexity of interfirm ties. Engaging into collaborative linkages with organizations that operate within the same sector for instance, was claimed to be an “Absolute no go” (nTA-P-1a). In a similar perspective, a different participant stated: “These firms are also the ones that we compete against, and you do not want to give them a lot of information” (TA-P-8a).

9.3 Networking function
When the participants were asked to elaborate on the concept of the networking function, five of the participants stress the importance of networking via TAs. One of the participants for example mentions: “They organize a lot of dedicated networking opportunities and we are always happy to be part of them as they allow us to connect to other organizations” (TA-P-6a). In this relation, moreover, one participant (TA-P-8) notes to be satisfied with the current role of the TA, as they actively facilitate networking possibilities and the exchange of information and resources.
In comparison, two participants mainly hint at less positive aspects of TAs regarding the particular way of facilitating networking functionalities and the exchange of information and resources. For instance, one participant (nTA-P-9) reports that the absolute lack of networking opportunities and associated exchange of information and resources was the main reason for their decision to cancel their membership.

With regard to the possibilities of SM to facilitate networking opportunities, six of the participants note that they make use of SM within a business context. Two participants explain that the possibilities gained from using SM as a platform enables them to connect to various stakeholders and also allows them to exchange and obtain information and resources (e.g., hiring of personnel). As one participant states: “In this particular networking function, SM performs a different role, in that it facilitates ties to competitors, suppliers and potential clients. So for us, the importance of SM has grown significantly over the past few years.” (TA-P-4d). Similarly, one of the participants (TA-P-7) highlights that SM are part of the ecosystem of the company which in their case includes all possible stakeholders.

In regard to the possibility of SM to provide access to information and support sharing it in a business context, nine of the participants explicitly stated that SM proved to be a useful means. For example one participant mentioned: “No less than 80.0% of the total amount of information that we collect and share runs through some form of SM” (nTA-P-1b).

In contrast, three participants note that although SM can offer interesting features with regard to networking, there are constraints that pose a limiting factor for them to fully adopt SM as a means of networking. For instance, one participant mentions: “When it comes to the supporting of relationships, I believe that it is important to frequently meet and speak to one another and to do that via SM is difficult” (TA-P-6b). Additionally, a different participant claims not yet to be experiencing the supposed advantages of SM in facilitating a network.

Furthermore, one of the participants (TA-P-10), underlines the lack of organization of some forms of SM, such as for example LinkedIn, and mentions in this relation that for instance the access to SM portals cannot be perfectly controlled and that this impacts the quality and depth of the information that can be shared freely in such a context.
When asked about network functionalities, three participants highlighted that they had built and maintained networks without the influence of for example a TA. One of the participants stated: “Every year I organize a [gathering], for which I send invites to 150 people that are working in the same sector in order to swap ideas and experiences” (TA-P-4c).

9.4 Advisory and consultative services

In relation to advisory and consultative services, five of the participants mark that they obtain such services directly via TA membership. Three participants for instance highlight the positive contribution of benchmarks to their knowledge level. One of the participants for example states: “Via our TA we are offered information on key ratio criteria which allows us to draw a comparison across the total sector on components such as salary levels, turnover, and profitability, and I find that to be particularly helpful” (TA-P-7b). Additionally, one participant (TA-P-4) mentioned the added value of benchmarking on for example salary levels and noted to be bothered when informed that the TA decided to stop offering this service in the future. The importance of the role of TAs concerning research on market developments was highlighted by two participants, as they mentioned that TAs offered a valuable source to increase their knowledge levels.

The advisory role of the TA was mentioned by three participants as they indicated the contribution of expert knowledge and also specialized interest groups, as exemplified by one of the participants: “There recently was an issue with the [legislation], which had upset practically the entire sector and in these types of situations, the TA took on an exemplary role and also offered individual advice on how to handle the situation and I value that to a great extent” (TA-P-6c). Different to the latter, two participants pointed out that their respective TA did not offer such functionality as they lacked the specific knowledge to do so.

In regard to the use of SM, five participants stated that they utilized at least one form of SM for obtaining advisory and consultative services. When focusing more on applying SM in order to keep track of the market developments, three participants explained that SM offered them a means to do so. As one participant comments: “SM allow us to get in touch with numerous publications that provide us with relevant information regarding market trends” (nTA-P-9a). Similarly, one of the participants (TA-P-8) acknowledges that SM were used in order to stay informed on the latest developments in both the business sector and beyond.
In contrast, one participant (TA-P-10) points at the complexity of strategic business objectives when it comes to performing market analyses or benchmarks, and claims that a competitive focus oftentimes prevents organizations to engage into these forms of collaboration via SM.

9.5 Self-regulation

In total, four participants mention the benefits of self-regulatory services, for instance: “I can imagine that it would be helpful to have a dedicated association that guards the collective interests of the sector via regulation” (nTA-P-2b). However, two of these participants noted that the supposed need for self-regulation in general, did not reflect their specific situation, as they pointed out that their organizations were operating in a sub-sector that was already highly regulated by government and specialized institutes.

Five participants explained that self-regulatory services were provided to them directly via their TA, and mentioned such matters as the importance of the assurance of a certain quality on the one hand as noted by one of the participants: “We regard TA membership to represent a certain label of quality, and that is especially important in order to separate the wheat from the chaff” (TA-P-4e) and on the other hand promoting and protecting a shared code of conduct as mentioned by three of the participants, for example: “That code of conduct was instated by the […] and we are still committed to it and its implications stretch far beyond government legislation” (nTA-P-9b). One participant (TA-P-6), moreover, pointed at the role of a TA in contributing to and coordination the development of a uniform currency model.

However, one of the participants noted that in regard to a general code of conduct the TA representation was falling short of his expectations (TA-P-4). Additionally, one participant noted an undesirable aspect of institutionalizing self-regulation, as the participant: “If you as a TA want to instate a certain code of conduct, or label of quality, you would also have to strongly preserve it at the same time, and that can prove to be challenging” (TA-P-7c). The participant adds not to support the institutionalization of self-regulation via for example a TA.

Three participants mentioned that SM offer a possibility to engage in forms of judgment evaluation in a social context, and also allows for unwritten conditional elements (e.g., rules) to be put forward. As one participant for example comments: “When a company oversteps certain [unwritten] boundaries, it will certainly be discussed on SM” (nTA-P-2c). One
participant (TA-P-7) comments in this relation that SM are useful for both facilitating a platform for discussion and also advertising and acknowledgement of a desirable code of conduct or a certain label of quality.

Moreover, one participant (nTA-P-9) stresses that SM can also be a limiting factor in regard of self-regulation, noting that SM are too fragmented to be able to effectively facilitate debates and discussions regarding a technical form of regulation. The participant adds that “if this terrain would be left to experts and specialists that can represent the interests [of a collection of actors] you might be more successful” (nTA-P-9c).

9.6 Representative and lobbying function
One participant (TA-P-6) notes that in case of important matters, the chairman of the TA sometimes will aim the industries lobby directly to the stakeholders in the appropriate government positions in person. Moreover, one of the participants (TA-P-7) comments that the TA has employed a certain lobbyist whose main objective is to represent the industry in the political circles and at the same time directly reports the findings back to the TA.

The importance of a homogeneous representation of the sector and the associated lobby was stressed by six of the participants. They indicated that a TA fitted best to this matter. For example, one of the participants notes: “It means that I do not have to go up to The Hague by myself in order to defend my particular interests, but instead can join forces with others to make it work” (TA-P-7d). Furthermore, one of the participants (nTA-P-9) notes that without joint representation, the chances for successful lobbying are extremely limited. In addition, it is mentioned by one participant that: “Governmental representatives on the other hand, are very cautious to listen to individual companies and prefer talking to the TAs” (TA-P-10a).

A different example of representation was provided by three participants, as they commented on the recent lobbying efforts regarding the cookie legislation changes. One participant states: “They [TA] have been actively involved in the new cookie legislation and by now we all have had the chance to see the results, so from my point of view this has not been a successful lobby” (nTA-P-9d).

16 The Hague is the seat of the Dutch government and parliament
17 De Nederlandse cookiewetgeving
SM, according to three participants offer useful functionalities for representation and lobbying purposes. One participant (TA-P-6) mentions the use of for example Facebook in order to guide the lobbying process as well as to generate leverage for specific individual as well as shared interests. Furthermore, one participant (TA-P-7) stated that SM can be interesting to encourage passion and commitment amongst important stakeholders.

In addition, one of the participants (TA-P-10) claimed that SM offers great potential to enhance TA lobbying functionalities. When asked specifically whether lobbying via SM could be successful, this participant stated: “Yes I believe it can be successful. In my opinion namely, SM can [be used to] cut through all of the filters that people have around them and in that way you can reach them” (TA-P-10b). This participant adds that: “A capable lobbyist that is, for example, part of a TA knows which stakeholders he can contact via which channels (…) are appropriate in which situation and that SM are part of the toolbox” (TA-P-10c).

In relation to the potential of SM for representative and lobbying functionalities, three participants mentioned that they did not find SM to be useful, best shown in the following commentary (nTA-P-9e):

*NTA-P-9: That [effective lobby] is impossible to achieve individually (…) you will need an organization like a TA.*

*Interviewer: OK, and you do not see these functionalities offered in SM, for example the association [of individuals]*?

*NTA-P-9: NO, when it comes to legislation, the legislator will always search for a representative organization, an association that acts on behalf of the industry and that is something that I do not believe SM are capable of creating.*

### 9.7 Providing a sense of belonging

When asked for their experiences regarding sense of belonging, all participants were able to provide examples, and almost all highlighted the importance of these matters. Three participants for instance noted that they oftentimes attended social gatherings, informal drinks, and dedicated networking initiatives. For example: “Yes we attend these initiatives regularly and it allows us to meet and discuss with different people from the industry” (nTA-
In regard to the TA role, five participants mention various activities that are organized, such as sessions, lectures, and industry awards, for example: "There are lectures hosted regularly that will inspire you, and they [TA] also organize media awards and to win one of those truly is good for your reputation" (TA-P-6d). One participant (TA-P-7) highlights the importance of a sense of belonging and notes that a social dimension adds greatly to the establishment of the industry as it is of relatively short age. Moreover, one participant (TA-P-8) noted that a recent sailing trip that was organized via a TA helped the process of teambuilding.

In contrast, one participant (TA-P-4) stated not to recognize the sense of belonging in respect to a TA, and added that this TA failed to offer a sense of belonging. The same participant, however, also claimed to be a true believer in the power of joint action. One participant (TA-P-10) stated that whereas discussion and interest groups tend to renew themselves from time to time, TAs are sometimes unable and unwilling to do so.

SM was mentioned by three participants as a means via which they were able to locate likeminded others. As one participant states: "A lot of meetings take place via SM (…) here you are inspired and able to get in contact and discuss with almost anybody". (nTA-P-2d). One of the participants (TA-P-4), moreover, indicated to be using SM particularly to give expression to the profile of the company and to efficiently "spread its story". Two other participants mentioned the ability of gaining what they referred to as inspiration. For example one participant (TA-P-5) stated that SM offered a way to get inspired through providing access to various discussions in which the participant held a particular interest.

One participant (TA-P-7) noted a challenge for TAs regarding the way in which they are recognized and accepted due to a democratization of information by means of SM on the one hand and the demand for representation of a TA via a single source on the other. Additionally, one of the participants (TA-P-10) notes that not all discussions and meetings can be facilitated via SM and that they will never capture the entire spectrum of providing a sense of belonging.
9.8 Internal organizing function

The exchange of formal knowledge, for example through a specialized training, is, according to one of the participants (nTA-P-1), something that is obtained explicitly by the organization via for example collaborative relations with other companies.

Three of the participants claim that they have participated in a training that was provided to them via their respective TA. One participant states that it is important that more formal training is developed via TAs, as evident in the following fragment: “What would definitely be relevant, is a training specifically developed for the middle management and we are engaged in developing it accordingly” (TA-P-7e).

One participant mentioned to be searching mostly outside of the TA in order to obtain formal information exchange and training. The participant stated: “To a large extent these [Courses and trainings] cannot be provided by the TA, and I do not expect them to do so either way” (TA-P-4f). This participant continued to mention the benefit of the use of online instruments in order to search for specific courses and practices.

Additionally, one of the participants (nTA-P-2) mentions the possibilities of obtaining such services via colleagues and by leveraging the direct and indirect network via SM. The participant continued to explain that SM provide access to knowledge and resources. Furthermore, one of the participants (TA-P-8) claimed that the organization has not yet made much use of SM in regard to formal training, although the participant could imagine the proposed benefits of doing so. One participant (TA-P-10) noted that SM particularly play a part in the search for courses and formal training, as well as in the sharing of the content.

Five participants made mention of making use of the possibilities to profit from collective benefits and advantages through economies of scale via their respective TA. Two of the participants mention in this regard that this service was the main reason for their organizations to join a TA. Furthermore, one of the participants (TA-P-5) argues that although there was interest in such services, it was not clear whether the TA provided them.

Three of the participants stated that they did not use SM to profit from collective benefits and advantages through economies of scale. One of the participants (TA-P-5) pointed out that
although the organization did search for these services via SM, the negotiation process was oftentimes too difficult for the organization to undertake individually.

9.9 Additional findings

Apart from the findings that have been presented above and are clearly linked to the key functions of TAs, as well as the possibilities for SM with regard to these particular functions, some additional statements worth mentioning have also been collected.

9.9.1 Statements regarding Trade Association membership

In general, four participants explained that the reason for them to have joined a TA was because they believed that taking collective action oftentimes yields stronger and more satisfying results. One of the participants notes: “To join forces allows you to ultimately stand stronger” (TA-P-4g). In addition, one participant (TA-P-6) states that by joining a TA, they have been able to influence a part of society. Yet another participant comments on the value of collective representation via TAs: “In representation towards the legislator [government], they [TAs] are attractive and in my opinion there they can still play a part” (nTA-P-9f).

In terms of cost analysis, four participants have stated that the costs of TA membership exceed the benefits. For example this participant mentions: “It [TA membership] is something that generally costs a lot of time and money whereas in our view it does not yield a direct return on investment” (nTA-P-1c). This participant adds that, the reason for not joining a specific TA has to do with the fact that there are various companies that also provide specialized services. One participant stated that the supposed benefits were no reason to continue the TA membership as they did not outweigh the related costs: “They [TA] have failed in convincing me that there was more to gain than what I actually have gotten out of it” (nTA-P-9g). In addition, one participant (TA-P-4) comments that a number of companies have already left the TA because of the absence of sufficient return on their investment.

In terms of the current position of TAs, four participants highlight that TAs no longer hold a key position when it comes to being an information conglomerate and hint at the factor of freedom of information. One participant for instance mentions in this respect: “There just are too many sources and TAs are unable to claim them all” (TA-P-4h). One participant (TA-P-7) mentions that the position of TAs has changed due to an overall increase of transparency and
that access to information was the underlying current in this particular process. This participant states: “This is a big problem for TAs, since because of this of course the membership fee can no longer be [fully] justified” (TA-P-7f).

Moreover, three participants voiced their concerns over the abundance of available TAs. One participant for instance states: “In all fairness, I have to say that the supply [of TAs] is so abundant that I am now more averse to them, than that I have confidence in them (…) There just are too many [TAs]” (TA-P-4i). One participant (TA-P-6), furthermore, mentions the recent cancellation of the organization’s membership because of both the overlap in representation as well as to the associated costs of membership. One participant (TA-P-7) notes, that although it may prove to be difficult, TAs do have a huge challenge in demonstrating very clearly their added value. The participant continues to add that: “The relevance, the benefits of what they offer to you, those are almost balanced annually” (TA-P-7g). One participant (nTA-P-2), furthermore, claims that the TA does not match the need for representation, and further mentions that the TA has severely lagged behind on the recent developments of the sector.

Moreover, another participant (nTA-P-9) argues that in order to stay relevant, the business model of the TA needs adjustment. In this regard, another participant states: “I think that the role of TAs is changing drastically (…) They [TAs] need to show more accurately what it is they stand for, as their importance is not what it used to be” (TA-P-7h). Additionally, one of the participants (TA-P-5) noted to be expecting TAs to take on a more active role in the near future, as the participant explained the necessity of adopting a more demand-driven approach.

9.9.2 Statements regarding Social Media

With regard to SM, five participants mention the importance of their integrated role into their respective organizations. One participant, for instance, notes: “SM are a part of our entire spectrum of touch points [with the environment]” (TA-P-7i). One participant (TA-P-5), furthermore, notes that SM represent a constant process that allows the organization to increase the dialogue between the company and its environment, in order to improve the company’s products and services. One participant comments in this respect: “In the current age of information, you need to be have a constant presence on SM” (nTA-P-2e), and added that “nowadays everything starts online” (nTA-P-2f).
Three of the participants highlight that SM for business purposes have matured over time, for example: “What you can do now [with SM] and the knowledge that one now has to access information is a huge difference compared to not five, but also one year ago” (nTA-P-1d). One of the participants (TA-P-4) noted that SM have grown more comprehensive and are increasingly becoming a commodity. The participant adds that this role of SM suits that of his industry. Two of the participants underline that the significance of SM within a business context will continue to grow and further mention the importance of appropriate processing of the abundance of information, for instance: “Connecting different sources of information, what is referred to in the industry as Big Data, if you are well prepared for this as a company, you will have a huge advantage over the competition” (nTA-P-1e).

In contrast, three participants noted that SM are not suitable and preferable in every context. For example: “I am a huge proponent of transparency, but I believe that in some cases you almost lack the subtlety to do it electronically [via SM]” (TA-P-5c). Another participant (TA-P-6) explains to sometimes prefer face-to-face contact as trustworthiness and reliability are important factors of a social relationship that SM are not able to offer.

Further, five of the participants discuss matters that are related to the novelty of SM. One of the participants (TA-P-8) for instance mentions that SM use poses uncertainties regarding ethical considerations. Another participant (TA-P-7) claims to be unsure regarding the true value of SM for the organization. One of the participants, moreover, mentions that SM can cause information overkill: “The number of LinkedIn groups is increasing so rapidly (…) that you almost go mad over all of the different newsletters et cetera” (TA-P-6e).

9.9.3 Statements on developments Social Media for Trade Associations

Additional remarks on the future development of SM within the domain of TAs have been captured. Six participants, for example, highlight the possibilities of using SM in order to support offline initiatives. For example: “SM are able to enrich the level of interaction, especially regarding for example lectures” (TA-P-6f). The participant (TA-P-6) adds that SM can facilitate the important aspect of connecting the on- and offline domains through acting as an element of integration.
Another participant mentions in this regard: “SM can play an important part in the promotion of and perhaps also in the experience during and after a meeting” (TA-P-10d). In addition, this participant remarks that experience shows that especially the smaller TAs may potentially benefit from integrating SM into the company, as the participant indicates: “Smaller TAs oftentimes lack a well-functioning members portal and thus are dependent on alternative resources” (TA-P-10e).

In regard to the role of the TA in terms of added value, one of the participants (TA-P-7) claimed that it has changed drastically because of both the sense of freedom regarding information and the rise and growing importance of SM. The participant continues to comment, stating: “In the increase of the dynamics and flexibility [of information] lies a huge challenge for TAs, and in that challenge, SM is not a possibility, but a vital part, and if you [as a TA] do not pick it up, then you are done” (TA-P-7j).

Furthermore, one of the participants (TA-P-10) mentions that TAs should not advertise SM as an isolated matter as the participant believes that TAs should be the center of attention and adds: “We encourage TAs to adopt SM (...) but in the way that traffic is generated from SM towards the TAs domain and not the other way around” (TA-P-10f). Moreover, this participant argues that the role of SM is characterized by facilitating people in reaching certain conclusions quicker, connecting them to likeminded people and allowing them to discuss and share information and in that way SM partly overlap with TAs. The participant adds that: “TAs who appropriately build up SM capabilities (...) will be able to deliver better results against lower costs” (TA-P-10g).

10 Conclusion
In order to provide an answer to the central research question of the current study, the following paragraphs will first draw in detail several conclusions that are derived from the previously presented results. Additionally, a conservative presumption of the extent to which SM are able to challenge TAs will be presented. Ultimately, an answer will be provided to the central research question of the current study.
10.1 Participant profile
Based on the participant profile, it needs to be pointed out that the actual research population turned out slightly different than originally anticipated. In the group of participants that were selected to represent the TA members, only five participants actually complied with this condition as the company of one of the participants in this group had recently cancelled their membership. Although this error posed a flaw in the design, the outcome however meant that the insights from this participant would provide data that otherwise would have been neglected. Additionally, the company of the specialist participant proved to be a TA member, which lifted the total number of participants in this group back to six.

In terms of the participant’s familiarity with SM applications, it can be noted that such SM applications as Social networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google Circles), (Micro)Blogs (e.g., Twitter), and to a lesser extent Content aggregators were mentioned mostly by participants.

Furthermore, based on the answers the participants provided in relation to the size of their respective company, it can be confirmed that they were all SMEs. The function distribution of the participants learned that seven of the participants held executive level positions, whereas the other three participants held non-management, yet respected positions in their respective organizations.

10.2 Interorganizational collaboration
Worth noticing, is that almost all examples provided by the participants in this regard, were examples in which the collaborative behavior was geared directly towards the end-customer. Moreover, the rationale for engaging into collaborative linkages was explained to be in order to (temporarily) strengthen the existing firm-related capabilities, suggesting that by means of forming collaborative linkages, the objective of gaining a competitive advantage could be achieved. The documented results thus seem to be in line with the proposed theory, that explains the formation of interorganizational collaborative linkages as an extension of information and recourses that potentially provide organizations with a basis for strategic advantage.

In addition to the proposed theory, the results suggested a difference in the approach towards
engaging in interorganizational collaboration based on short versus long term objectives. As part of the results showed a modest, yet reasonable suggestion that the motives for engaging into interfirm collaborative linkages was because it allowed the organizations to increase their long-term level of knowledge and capabilities, whereas the majority of the results suggested that the primary objective for interorganizational collaboration was to increase the short-term level of knowledge and capabilities (i.e., scale-up) in order to better serve the need of the customer.

In terms of the collaboration structure it is worth mentioning that the results suggested that different types of collaborative linkages may exist for different purposes and that organizations sometimes manage this ‘portfolio’ of relationships alongside each other. Additionally, the results may indicate that interorganizational collaboration is not to all organizations a favored method to increase knowledge and capability levels, as the results showed that the willingness of organizations to engage into these types of commitment depends on the level of strategic complexity of the collaborative relation.

10.3 Networking function

In line with the proposed theory on networking, the results clearly support the notion that TAs have an important role in connecting independent organizational actors and facilitating the interorganizational transfer of knowledge and the exchange of resources. Additionally, the results showed that member organizations are able to leverage the TA network in order to extend the number of existing ties and associated access to sources of information.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that although the results do not have sufficient power to prove causality, the level of perceived quality of the TA network, together with the perceived benefits that accrue from it (e.g., exchange of information and resources) do tend to hold important implications for the overall cost/benefit ratio regarding the logic of TA membership.

The results, furthermore, strongly indicated that organizations can benefit from utilizing the network provided to them via SM, as it allows them to connect to various stakeholders and accordingly, also to obtain from diverse sources information and resources. Moreover, the results indicated that SM are highly applicable within the business context, as the results
showed that SM can be utilized in order to share professional information and obtain resources (such as the hiring and remuneration of personnel). It is worth mentioning that the results also indicated that a possible limitation of SM use could be that SM are currently lacking the option of imposing specific forms of control, like for example the control of access to certain platforms.

The results, furthermore, suggested that limitations may be linked to using SM as the main source for networking functionalities, given its supposed exclusivity for online usage. It can be noted, however, that the results showed that organizations seemed to occupy access to multiple networks and are able to leverage these according to their apparent needs and whether the network is suitable for the specific situation. Further, the results indicated that although there is no significant difference between TA membership organizations and non-TA membership organizations in the extent to which SM are utilized for networking purposes, non-TA members may depend to a greater extent on networking functionalities via SM than do TA members.

10.4 Advisory and consultative services
The presented results are in accordance with the theory on advisory and consultative services, indicating that organizations by means of TA membership are able to obtain highly specialized industry-specific information, such as market research and benchmarks on for instance salary levels. It can be noted here that the results indicated that member organizations are to a great extent dependent on a TA to provide them with benchmarks and industry-related information and that TAs thus hold a key position. Moreover, from the results can be derived that member organizations value the role of TAs in that they are regarded as the primary source of industry-specific advice, yet the results also suggested that not every TA is able to offer its members the ability benefit from such specialized advisory and consultative services. This latter part suggests that some TA members, as well as non-TA members are thus dependent on alternative sources to obtain these services.

Furthermore, the results indicated that SM are able to offer its participants the ability to access a number of types of advice and consultation. Moreover, the results also provided evidence for the support of the presumption that openness and transparency are the key determining factors in this regard. The results however did provide no actual information on the possibility
to obtain specialized, industry-related advice via SM, although one can argue in this case that the results did not provide evidence to contradict the possibility either. Furthermore, the results did not provide clear evidence for the actual level of specialization and depth of the information that can be obtained via the use of SM. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the results showed that a competitive focus possibly prevents organizations from engaging in these forms of collaboration via SM. Additionally, no clear difference was found in the level of utilization of SM between TA members and non-TA members.

Since it was found that not all TAs are equally able to offer advisory and consultative services to its member organizations, and since the results indicated that advisory and consultative services are considered as highly valuable resources to TA members, and also non-TA members, one could have easily suggested that this gap could potentially be covered by SM. Yet, although the results indicate that SM offer appropriate open and transparent structures for participants to potentially gather sources of information, advice and consultation, however, no evidence was found that indicated that SM in this regard are utilized as an alternative to TAs.

10.5 Self-regulation
The findings clearly showed a variation in the extent to which TA members make use of and value the self-regulatory services provided to them via the TA. The results, for instance, showed the importance of a certain quality assurance and a shared code of conduct and are thus in line with the theory that states that self-regulation via TAs assures organizations a safeguard of their individual interests by means of collective action. Additionally, the results suggested that although the general concept of self-regulatory services was in general perceived to be important by both TA members and non-TA members, there seemed, however, to be a lesser need for, or interest in this type of services coming from non-TA members. Contrastingly, it can be noted that the findings suggested that not all organizations favor applying self-regulation to their industry, as it is indicated that self-regulation can collide with business interests.

The findings on the opportunities for obtaining self-regulatory services via SM are in line with the presumptions, as it turned out to be an area not covered by research. It is worth mentioning that the results suggested a potential for a certain extent of self-regulation to take place via SM, such as for example judgment evaluation in a social context, and also unwritten
conditional elements (e.g., rules). Furthermore, it can be noted that although the results suggested that SM are probably too fragmented to effectively facilitate self-regulatory services, and that in general it is therefore best left to the experts and specialists, the results, however, also indicated that SM are found to offer adequate opportunities for professional use (e.g., mobilizing social pressure).

10.6 Representative and lobbying function
In line with the theory, the results indicated that individual member organizations indeed make use of TAs for collective representation. Furthermore, the results showed that joint representation via TAs is perceived as beneficial for individual companies. Moreover, the results suggested that although non-TA members are aware of the benefits of a collective lobby, they do not consider joining a TA because of it.

Additionally, the results indicated that joint representation is an important factor for the ultimate effectiveness of lobbying, and that in order to increase the effectiveness of the lobby, some TAs have employed a dedicated person to take on the representative and lobbying tasks, whereas most of the TAs have not. Contrastingly, the results suggested that representation and lobbying in some cases may result in unwanted outcomes, which are then felt by the entire industry.

The results suggested that, based on the lack of collectiveness, it can be argued that SM alone are not able to offer adequate support for representative and lobbying needs. SM, however, do offer useful functionalities for representation and lobbying purposes, such as encouraging passion and commitment amongst important stakeholders. It can be argued here that although SM seem to be unable to directly influence the legislator and/or policy maker, SM are able to mobilize a critical mass. Furthermore, the results strongly indicated that SM can be a valuable asset for reinforcing TA lobbying functionalities, as it is mentioned that SM for example can be integrated as an additional tool for lobbyists.

10.7 Providing a sense of belonging
The results strongly suggested an important role of the TA in providing organizations with a sense of belonging and, moreover, showed that inspirational activities and the possibility to get connected to likeminded others are perceived most important in this regard. Furthermore,
the results indicated that the industry as a whole can potentially benefit from these activities that are provided to individual companies. The results further suggested that a collective sense of belonging can be feasible for immature industries. Moreover, the results indicated that some TAs may happen to be more successful compared to others in either providing individual organizations with a sense of belonging, or in providing the perception of a sense of belonging.

Strong evidence was found that showed the importance of achieving a sense of belonging, regardless of whether the organization was a TA member or not. In addition, the results indicated that there was no significant variation between TA member organizations and non-TA member organizations in the extent to which SM was utilized in order to obtain a sense of belonging.

In regard to the ability of SM to provide participants with a sense of belonging, the results strongly suggested that SM offer a suitable means. Based on the results, it can for example be mentioned that organizations can utilize SM in order to reach places and contexts where participants can get in contact with likeminded others, and can engage in discussions and can also find inspiration. In contrast, however, the results also showed that there may be challenges posed to SM, as it was found that its supposed ability to add value in the online arena only could limit SM in the extent to which they will be able to fully offer all aspects of providing a sense of belonging to individual organizations. Yet, as indicated before, SM are increasingly able to also offer added value in offline contexts.

10.8 Internal organizing function
In line with the theory, the results showed that TA member organizations seek to benefit from various alternative services, such as for example the possibility to participate in specialized courses and training, and the possibility to benefit from the collective benefits that are offered to them. Additionally, the results indicated that for some organizations, the opportunity to profit from the collective benefits is the most important factor for their logic of TA membership. Moreover, the results suggested the importance of the development of courses and trainings by the TA.
Moreover, it is worth noticing that the results showed that TA members sometimes are either unable to locate specific collective benefits, or that they are unaware of the possibility to benefit from them. Additionally, with regard to the possibility of SM to offer collective benefits to participants, the results were mixed, yet the evidence was inconclusive, providing no grounds for elaborating further.

The results strongly indicated that SM are able to provide its participants with sources of information dedicated for learning and practicing. Moreover, the results suggested that SM participants have the potential for obtaining such services through leveraging the various linkages offered to them via SM. Moreover, the results suggested that TA member organizations oftentimes use online instruments in order to locate formal training and the exchange of related information specifically outside of the TA.

10.9 Central research question

*To what extent can Social Media replace other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as Trade Associations?*

In order to provide an answer to the central research question, there should first be mentioned that in order to replace TAs, SM should form a substitute according to the theory of Porter (2008). In order to count as a substitute, SM should therefore perform in the same or a similar way as TAs. Additionally, SM should offer an attractive cost/benefit prospect compared to TAs and, also, the switching cost to SM should be relatively low (Porter, 2008).

Based on the various findings, it can be made clear that SM are able to challenge TAs in some areas, more than in others:

a) Networking function
SM offer organizations to a similar extent the possibilities of gaining advantages that are comparable to the advantages offered to organizations by TA membership. Although the results showed that possible limitations can arise when using SM as a main provider of networking functionalities, the results also indicated the huge potential that SM are able to offer in terms of providing access to embedded knowledge and resources.
b) Advisory and consultative services
Although SM are able to provide access to sources of specialized information, the extent to which SM are able to challenge TAs, however, is slim, due to the fact that TAs are able to offer highly specialized and sector-specific knowledge that has accumulated over time. Since the results additionally suggested that a potential lack of willingness to collaborate could occur due to strategic complexity, it can be concluded that, based on the results found in this study, SM are not able to challenge TAs in offering advisory and consultative services.

c) Self-regulation
The results have indicated that SM can support some specific forms of self-regulation, for instance by means of instating user protocols/agreements (e.g., no swearing allowed) that users have to accept in order to make use of the SM platform. Yet, in contrast, the results found no evidence of SM being able to offer and support self-regulation to a similar extent as TAs. It can thus be concluded that the possibility for SM to effectively draw up and preserve self-regulation and challenge TAs seems to be unrealistic at this moment.

d) Representative and lobbying function
SM offer a large set of tools for such matters as the mobilization of individuals, the efficient sharing of opinions and information, the fostering of discussions in dedicated interest groups, and also the achieving of an appropriate reach over important stakeholders over different channels. Effective lobbying requires special techniques which are generally developed over time. The success of lobbying via SM thus remains doubtful due to the lack of collective organization and its relatively short age.

e) Providing a sense of belonging
SM are able to offer a genuine sense of belonging of considerable importance to its participants. Moreover, it can be suggested that as SM are continuing to find ways in which they are able to add value in the intertwined on- and offline environment, the potential for SM to provide ways in which users are able to find a sense of belonging will increase accordingly. It can thus be argued that SM can challenge this specific TA offering.

f) Internal organizing function
The potential of SM to provide access to formal in-depth information sources and a network
to search for example formal courses and training practices was clearly shown. There has been, however, no decisive material found in order to indicate the ability of SM to offer collective benefits. SM thus are able to challenge the TAs internal organizing function partly, yet SM seem at this point in time still lack the power of organization in order to fully facilitate collective benefits.

There are certain domains, such as networking, advisory and consultative services, and providing a sense of belonging where SM can arguably challenge TAs. In contrast, there are also certain domains, such as self-regulation, representative and lobbying functions, and internal organizing functions that seem to remain untouched by SM. The areas in which SM are unable to challenge TAs are those areas where the benefits of collective representation are most considerable.

Looking at the switching costs associated with SM, it can be argued that these are fairly low. The usage of most SM applications is free of charge, allowing one to switch over to SM with ease. Yet, in order to fully utilize SM to its full benefits, there obviously needs to be made an investment of both time and effort, for instance in order to become familiar with the different applications of SM. The results have, furthermore, indicated that although SM use in a business context has developed and matured over time, there arguably are still certain business areas in which SM are not suitable and preferable. Additionally, the results suggested that SM still have some potential issues regarding for example content ownership, as well as uncertainties regarding for example ethical considerations, that cannot be neglected. In order to increase the extent to which organizations are able to benefit from the use of SM, it thus seems vital to improve the overall level of understanding, before SM can be fully utilized. It thus seems reasonable to conclude here that:

**Although SM overlap some of the functions of TAs in certain areas, they cannot generically be regarded as a replacement of other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as TAs at this moment in time.**

Yet, one needs to be careful about not misinterpreting the outcomes of the current study. Although SM may not be considered a substitute (i.e., replacement) for TAs, based on the findings, important additional conclusions can be drawn in this regard.
It should for instance be noted that the results strongly indicated that SM are increasingly able to meet the high expectations, and thus are becoming more and more a useful instrument in the interrelated spectrum of both the organization and its environment. Moreover, based on the results it can be argued that SM already play an important part in both non-TA member organizations, as well as TA member organizations, and that the results, moreover, clearly indicate the increase of the durability and relevance of SM in diverse ways within contemporary organizations, thus underscoring that SM are here to stay.

Additionally, since it was found that the alternatives for representation are numerous (both in alternative member organizations as in SM), the results clearly indicated the responsibility and importance for TAs to demonstrate their added value. Failing to demonstrate the added value may lead to a loss of members, or towards a lack of potential new TA members, as the results have showed that when the TA is unable to clearly outline its added value, the organization will probably not be tempted to join.

Furthermore, the results have also indicated that there are several sources of added value for TA members should TAs successfully integrate and utilize SM to support both their online, and most importantly their offline initiatives. In doing so, SM thus can offer TAs a means to enhance the complete member experience. It can furthermore be concluded that the results strongly suggest that SM can prove to be an area in which TAs have a lot to gain. TAs should therefore take the development of SM seriously, as the results of the current study clearly indicate that SM, instead of being regarded as a threat, can also offer TAs with a potential to comprehensively strengthen their value proposition towards existing as well as potential new members.

Moreover, the results showed that it is important for TAs to not regard SM as an individual product, but to gradually implement several functionalities provided by SM into the business model, as this will allow TAs to carefully balance and adapt to new capabilities. Logically, as the results of the current study have indicated that there are certain areas in which SM can potentially overlap with the TA offering, one can argue that it is in these particular areas that TAs need focus on implementing SM. Finally, as the results have indicated that adequately adopting SM into their organization will enable TAs to achieve better results against lower
costs and in that way SM can thus provide TAs with a source of strategic competitive advantage.

11 Discussion
The following paragraphs will provide evaluation of the conducted research, as well as its findings. First, the limitations of the current study are presented. Next, the results that have been found will be discussed and shortcomings identified. Additionally, the theoretical implications and suggestions for additional research will be provided. Finally, the scientific relevance, societal relevance and managerial relevance are put forward.

11.1 Limitations of the current study
The results that have been presented in the current study should be interpreted while keeping several notable limitations in mind. While constructivist qualitative research, as conducted in the current research allows for the development of novel theories and theoretical models, one of the known limitations of this particular type of research, however, are low statistical validity and moderate generalizability (Johnson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The main cause for these limitations, according to these authors (Johnson, & Onwuegbuzie,, 2004), stems from the notion that in order to conduct a purely qualitative research, the researcher has to bear in mind that there can co-exist multiple-constructed realities and that generalizations free from time and context are neither desirable nor possible.

First, in accordance to Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers (2002) the sample has been appropriate as it consisted of participants who best represented and possessed the necessary knowledge that reflected the research topic and, therefore allowing for replication. Yet, these choices limit the generalizability of the findings of the current study. Accordingly, since all of the participant’s organizations operated within the business services sector, the results found are not generalizable outside of this particular sector. Moreover, as these organizations were all categorized as SMEs, the results can hardly be fully interpreted outside of this category. Furthermore, since all participants have been selected based on the essential criteria that there was high familiarity with SM in a professional, business context, this holds a limitation for the generalizibility of the results that were found. Finally, as for each organization that has been selected into the research population, there has been only one representative (i.e.,
employee) interviewed, which arguably has influenced the outcomes to a certain extent.

Second, the research was originally designed to allow for thorough comparison between TA member organizations and non-TA member organizations in the way they made use us SM in a business context and, ultimately, in ways potentially challenging towards TAs. Yet, as the first interviews with TA member organizations proved to provide significantly more interesting and in-depth findings, the design has been slightly altered. Although this change in research design may have led to a more appropriate sample (Morse et al., 2002), this choice however did have a notable effect on the ability to compare between TA member organizations and non-TA member organizations and in that way should be regarded as a limitation to the interpretability of the findings of the current study.

Third, although it has been attempted to control for threats to reliability, it is however likely that the results have been influenced by subject or participant error, subject or participant bias, observer error, and observer bias at least to a certain extent (Robson, 2002). The participants have been interviewed on a location of choice, which in most occasions meant that the interviews have taken place at the participant’s place of work. However, one interview took place at the participants place of residence, meaning that participant error may have occurred. Also, while the majority of the interviews have been conducted in a face-to-face setting, one of the interviews was conducted via the use of a voice-over-IP service (Skype). Although this technique allows for video streaming and can thus be regarded as a virtual equivalent of a face-to-face setting, observer error may have occurred. Finally, bias may occurred as both the researcher and participants have likely included their existing respective frame of reference into the way questions have been asked and answers have been given (Saunders et al., 2009).

Fourth, based on scholarly findings the current research has attempted to structure the benefits of engaging in collaboration via SM by making use of a comparative assessment approach. Furthermore, the same structure has been applied in order to form the basis for the semi-structured interviews. Although this approach ultimately allowed for better comparison between TAs and SM, and thus also for providing an answer to the central research question, this may have also limited the emerging of novel theoretical insights and concepts from the data and it must be therefore regarded as a limitation of the current study (Morse et al., 2002).
11.2 Discussion of the results, shortcomings and suggestions for further research

Following a comprehensive analysis of the findings, there has been provided an answer to the central research question. In the current section, the outcomes of the current study regarding the extent to which SM are able to replace TAs will be discussed based on the presumptions that have been presented earlier.

11.2.1 Interorganizational collaboration

Perhaps not a surprise is that the results that were found, are in line with the grounded theory on interorganizational linkages. It was for instance shown that organizations engage into various forms interorganizational collaboration as a response to the shortage of information, resources and capabilities. Organizations look to extent outside of the organizational boundaries in order to gain a competitive edge over their competitors. Worth noticing though, is that the results suggested that there is variation between short- and long-term objectives and that organizations seem to have a ‘portfolio’ of relationships which they utilize alongside each other. Moreover, in terms of the collaboration structure it is worth mentioning that the results suggested that different types of collaborative linkages may exist for different purposes.

One of the shortcomings of the current study perhaps is located in this particular area. Becoming a TA member namely, can be safely regarded as a collaboration strategy for the longer term, whereas the strategy to collaborate by means of SM, based on the findings, cannot be defined as to be an orientation for the shorter or, longer term, or a combination between those two. Moreover, scholars have suggested that with different forms of collaboration, organizations are exposed to different issues. Short-term collaboration may incline a large dependency on alternative organizations (e.g., Hamel et al., 1989; Hardy et al., 2003), whereas long-term collaboration may lead to knowledge spillover (e.g., Ahuja, 2000).

Following the above, a strong suggestion for further research would be to further examine the extent to which there is a difference in the strategic consideration for engaging into interfirm collaboration by means of TAs and SM in relation to an organization’s short- and long-term goals via qualitative, inductive research strategies. Conducting the suggested research would add to the current state of academic work in two important ways. First, it will provide detailed information regarding the costs and benefits related to each strategy. Second, it will provide a possible foundation for a theoretical framework to be built and ultimately tested via...
quantitative research methods. Additionally, should the objectives be made quantifiable, than this would allow managers to comprehensively determine when to apply which strategy based on an accurate model of costs and benefits.

11.2.2 Findings related to the main functions

a) Networking function
In line with the formulated presumptions, SM were found able to challenge TAs based on its networking functionalities. SM indeed allow for an extended network of interconnected sources and via SM, users are able to obtain various resources and information.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the results also indicated that a possible limitation of SM use could be that SM are currently lacking the possibility of imposing specific forms of control, like for example the control of access to certain platforms. Although it can be argued that the level of openness and transparency can be a limiting factor towards the formal controlling of which actors are granted access and which are not, it can also be argued here that based on the in this study applied definition of SM by Kaplan, & Haenlein (2010), the necessity of applying such control was not made explicit. It can furthermore be argued that there are numerous of platforms that although they do allow the formation of exclusive groups, still comply with the definition of SM by Kaplan, & Haenlein (2010).

Additionally, the results showed that non-TA members may depend to a greater extent on networking functionalities via SM as do TA members. While it is absolutely possible to make suggestions for these findings, it can also be noted as one of the shortcomings of the current study and it is strongly suggested that additional research should be conducted in order to further investigate the determining factors related here.

b) Advisory and consultative services
The findings here are almost entirely in line with the presumptions. SM are able to easily facilitate connections to other actors and the results have indicated that these sources can and indeed do contain specialized information.
Obtaining industry-related advice as well as consultancy-type services however, according to the results, is something that organizations hardly ever undertake via SM. The explanation for the findings that SM are unable to offer its users here is probably is a mixture of both a lack of concentration of specific resources, such as specialized knowledge and the ability to undertake collective action, such as the building up of centrally organized industry-related advice over time (Boléat, 2003).

c) Self-regulation
In regard to self-regulation, it was somewhat surprising to notice that the results showed that SM are becoming increasingly more organized and it can therefore be assumed that self-regulation in the near future can be part of the capabilities organizations can access via the SM phenomenon. It is for example not unthinkable that instating and controlling certain quality labels will be run entirely via SM. The role of moderators and editors will be extremely important in this regard. Important to note is that although there might be a lot of potential for self-regulation via SM, there is, however, only a slim comparison possible with the professional way in which TAs as solitary organizational entity are able to provide collective services such as self-regulation.

An explanation can be found in the work of Boléat (2003) in which he explains that one of the key aspects of self-regulation is its voluntary characteristics since, TA members volunteer to be subject to regulation which is typically not required by government law. It can be argued here that the most important prerequisite in order to make such a system work is if the control is centralized by way of TAs. SM probably are still too individual and also lack the means to perform a level of offline control.

d) Representative and lobbying function
SM are, similar to the related services of self-regulation, only to a certain extent able to challenge TAs when it comes to representative and lobbying services. The outcomes of this study were to the largest part in line with the presumption that although SM offer a large set of tools related to representative and lobbying, there is however lacking formal organization and a single source representation. One of the conclusions in this research, however, is that that there lurks great potential in the way in which SM are for example able to quickly connect and mobilize independent actors across multiple networks, discussion groups and
interest groups. Another important element mentioned is that SM are able to cut through different layers and is thus able to connect to almost anyone in just a fraction of time.

As the findings suggested that SM can potentially support representative and lobbying functionalities offered via TAs and, moreover, as the findings have also indicated that a number of TAs are already utilizing SM as a part of for example their existing lobbying activities, one of the shortcomings of the current study, however, is that the actual benefits of utilizing SM in the support representative and lobbying activities, however, have not been made explicit. Therefore it would be interesting to conduct additional research in order to examine which SM applications are considered by TAs to be most effective and efficient in supporting their representative and lobbying activities.

e) Providing a sense of belonging
As expected and mentioned in the presumption, SM are indeed perfectly capable to provide its users with a sense of belonging. This for instance reflects the increasing amount of time people are spending online (Safko, 2010). The ways to connect to for example interest groups, interact on discussion forums, create and share content and engage in online activities via social networking sites are only some of the examples in which SM are able to provide a sense of belonging.

One of the main conclusions found in this respect was that there seems to be an appealing possibility for TAs to incorporate SM in order to support the sense of belonging for TA members, as SM are able to offer all sorts of added value in this area. One of the possibilities would be for example including live Twitter feeds during TA events, the creation of special interest groups in an online context et cetera. In addition, TAs can utilize SM in order to promote a certain point of view, or to offer for instance information, and movie clips on external platforms. These activities logically lead to exposure and can thus bring in potential new members based on a shared sense of belonging.

f) Internal organizing function
In line with the presumption on the extent to which SM are able to provide internal organizing functionalities to its users, the results showed that SM indeed offer functionalities for
specialist training practices and courses. Content communities like for example Mashable\textsuperscript{18} can help share a wide range of different media types that center around a single favored topic or a collection of topics (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010).

In contrast to the presumption, it was not found that SM are able to offer an appropriate network to profit from collective service provision. Again, the explanation here lies in the assumedly too fragmented and individually oriented nature of SM. Although web based initiatives such as Groupon\textsuperscript{19} are for example able to offer quantity discounts to its users, its services, however, cannot be compared whatsoever to that of TAs.

\textbf{11.2.3 Central research question}

In line with the presumption regarding the extent to which SM are able to replace other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as TAs, the current study concluded that SM were only able to challenge TAs in certain areas, such as networking, advisory and consultative services, and providing a sense of belonging. Moreover, the current study concluded in that SM were unable to challenge TAs in certain areas, such as self-regulation, representative and lobbying functions, and internal organizing functions.

In general it was concluded that in line with the proposed theoretical rationale on interorganizational collaboration, SM, like TAs, are indeed utilized to extend the current set of ties, meaning that SM enables to a great extent the access to resources that can create value for the firm. Yet, the extent to which organizations are able to profit from collective action (i.e., representation) by means of TAs, are simply unchallenged by SM. Although one can argue that, based on the findings in the current study, SM are showing strong signs of development in those areas where collective action is important, the chances that SM will ever be able to fully challenge TAs in these areas, however, are slim.

As indicated in the previous chapter, this conclusion does however not mean that there are no strategic implications for TAs related to the SM phenomenon. For instance, the findings of the current research found strong evidence in support of the cost/benefit prospect regarding the threat of substitutes (Porter, 2008), meaning that it is vitally important for TAs to demonstrate their value to its members. The benefits of membership need to outweigh the costs in order for

\textsuperscript{18} http://www.mashable.com/
\textsuperscript{19} http://www.groupon.com/
the TA to prevent organizations from choosing to exit, or to persuade organizations in joining a TA. Here, two conclusions are discussed that are perceived highly important and also strongly recommended as a topic for further research.

First, the current study concludes that in case TAs are unable to offer a positive cost/benefit ratio, SM can – to a certain extent – be an alternative for TA membership, especially when taking in regard that the switching costs are presumably low. As it was outside the scope of the current research to investigate the switching costs related to the logic of membership, it is strongly encouraged for additional research to be conducted in this field of research. Such research will contribute to the state current research in three ways. First, important data will be collected on the costs related to switching to an alternative form of representation, such as SM. Second, it may provide some insight into an organization’s perception of the ‘value of collective representation’, since the current study suggests that this is a vital element that prevents most organizations from switching to an alternative form of representation, such as SM. Third, should the switching costs lead to a comprehensive theoretical framework than this can potentially lead to quantitative research models.

Second, the current study concludes that in case TAs adequately add SM to their existing capabilities, this will enable TAs to achieve better results against lower costs and in that way SM can provide TAs with a source of strategic competitive advantage. As the current study was aimed at investigating the extent to which SM can replace other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as TAs, its findings arguably do not hold enough reliability in order to form testable hypotheses. Additional qualitative research dedicated to examining the extent to which SM can provide TAs with a source of strategic competitive advantage will lead to valuable additional, in-depth findings in this area.

11.2.4 Findings on SM in a business context
The results suggested that although SM mainly seems to have relevance in the online arena, it has however also been shown that SM have purposes for the integration with offline areas and thus the need for TAs to further explore the added value of SM in these particular areas seems important. A possible shortcoming of the current study would be that although the results found in the current study strongly indicate that SM are able to bridge the supposed on-offline gap, the actual extent to which SM are able to do so, has not been made explicit.
In order to further examine the extent to which SM are able to add value in both on- and offline business contexts of the TA, additional research is advisable. Research in this area would provide additional insights in which areas SM are indeed able to bridge the on- and offline business context and are able to add value, and also, in which areas SM are unable to do so. Furthermore, such research would be of great strategic value to TAs as it will allow them to support strategic decision making in relation to the way they make use of SM.

11.2.5 Findings on SM challenges
Due to the continuing development of SM, the boundaries between businesses and public domains are fading away quickly and the emphasis on knowledge generation and accumulation is ever increasing. Subsequently, as organizations are increasingly looking for ways to benefit from the collective intelligence of the crowd, the economy as a whole is gradually taking a shift towards a means of mass collaboration (Hansen et al., 2010). Aside from the purely economic implications this suggested shift brings for TAs, there are also some challenges and issues to the use of SM and the related sharing of information and content.

In order to further examine the challenges and possible issues TAs potentially face when engaging into from SM use, additional research is strongly encouraged. Such research would contribute to the current state of scientific TA strategy literature in two ways. First, it could provide novel insights in a particular set of regulatory challenges that are related to SM, such as intellectual property rights, privacy regulations, and more generally the control over the content (Andriole, 2010). Second, these insights will provide both theoretical, as well as managerial implications regarding the transfer of knowledge and the interrelated role of SM.

11.3 Scientific relevance
The research gap that has been formulated encompassed both the unknown potential of SM for facilitating interorganizational collaboration in a business-to-business context (i.e., TAs), as well as its unattended potential external threat to the viability of TAs. Both topics have been carefully studied as the current study was set out to examine the extent to which SM was able to replace other forms of interorganizational collaboration, such as TAs. In ultimately providing an answer to the central research question, the research gap has been filled.
In conclusion, the current study has contributed to the academic field in that it has examined and provided insight into the potential of SM for facilitating interorganizational collaboration, through a comprehensive comparison with an established organizational representation of interorganizational collaboration, namely TAs. In doing so, not only has this research shown that the SM phenomenon can be an meaningful concept in a business-to-business context, but also, that to a certain extent, SM indeed can be regarded as a potential external threat to TAs.

Moreover, in combining two alternative, interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks (i.e., RBV of the firm, & network theory), the current study has not only added worth to an integrated theoretical approach towards the concept of interorganizational collaboration, as represented via TAs and SM, but, additionally, adds to the reputation of both concepts in strategy literature and may serve as the theoretical foundation in future research.

11.4 Societal relevance
The current study is relevant in a societal context in two ways. First, it has taken the first steps towards a better understanding of the contemporary role of SM in a business context and it has indicated that SM enable individual social actors to interact and together create and add value in numerous ways, whether it is to support a sense of belonging, or to exchange in-depth information, whether it is in a business or societal context. Second, based on the results it can be argued that SM are increasingly able to meet the high expectations in becoming a useful tool in the interrelated spectrum of both the organization and the organizational environment which includes multiple relevant stakeholders. The outcomes of this study thus also hold important implications that indicate the evolution and integration of both business and society towards a more open society.

11.5 Managerial relevance
The results and conclusions in this study hold valuable managerial relevance in a number of ways. First, as the results clearly show that failing to demonstrate the added value of the TA may lead to a loss of member organizations, and will prevent potential new TA members from joining, the responsibility for the TA to demonstrate its added value should not be taken lightly as the results show that alternative forms of representation, such as SM are present.
Although the results do not indicate SM to pose a direct threat to the TA viability at this point in time, it has also been shown that SM are becoming more relevant in various areas of both the society and business context. Furthermore, as SM continues its development, new technologies and thus ways to add value will continue to emerge. Scholars have for instance suggested that new ways to create and share information will emerge (Safko, 2010), and that new ways of monetization will impact the way of contribution towards adding collective value (O’Reilly, 2007). It is thus relevant for TA managers to study the outcomes of the current research and elaborate on the extent to which their TA is currently truly demonstrating its added value to its members.

Second, in accordance with the results in this study, it is key for the TA to integrate SM into the organization in order to support the on- and offline initiatives. This is important because the development of SM, together with the attention devoted to it by its users is changing the way in which content is created, transferred and consumed by established market participants and at the same time outlines its disruptive impact for traditional content suppliers (OECD, 2007). Additionally, the results of this research show that organizations are expecting the TA to implement it and doing so enables the TA to enhance the member experience. This study therefore is relevant to TA managers in the way that as its results indicate that the rise of SM and the associated developments, such as a potentially changing position, not necessarily have to be regarded as a threat, but can also potentially offer the TA with an opportunity to strengthen its value proposition towards existing as well as potential new members.

Third, following the notion that SM are becoming more and more intertwined within the areas of both the society and business context it is therefore important for TA managers to not regard SM as a stand-alone, individual product or solution. According to the results found in the current research, this study is relevant to TA managers, as it has indicated the areas that can potentially be strengthened by means of SM. Moreover, TA managers are provided with the information needed to first investigate and then implement SM into the business model, according to their added value to the TA. Managers also, as the specialist interview has shown, can decide whether they want to take on the process of implementing SM themselves, or if they want to allocate resources towards implementing professionally built TA software tools that can help the TA with integrating SM into the TA. Moreover it can be noted that especially a smaller TA can benefit from integrating SM into the company, as they oftentimes...
lack a well-functioning members portal and thus are dependent on alternative resources.

Fourth, what is relevant to indicate here is that the TA, in being an organization itself, will too be able to implement SM and engage into various forms of interaction and collaboration. The TA can in this way get connected to various different stakeholders, including for example other TAs. Engaging into interorganizational collaboration can, as both the theoretical concepts as well as the results of the current study have shown, provide TAs with a source of strategic competitive advantage. Relevant for the TA manager is the notion that the TA can, when adequately adopting SM and utilizing it to engage into collaboration with other TAs achieve better results against lower costs, as they can maybe share costs and resources.
References


Social media: friend or foe?
The rise of social media within trade associations’ domain


Social media: friend or foe?
The rise of social media within trade associations’ domain


Appendices

Appendix 1: TA logics and activities (Schmitter, & Streeck, 1981).

Appendix 2: Propeller model (Tack, & Beusmans, 2001).
Appendix 3: Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure</th>
<th>Social presence/ Media richness</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia) Content communities (e.g., YouTube) Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)</td>
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</table>

Appendix 4: Schematic overview of SM categorization and and examples of SM.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social networking sites</td>
<td>Online networks that enables interaction through users' personal profiles</td>
<td>MySpace, Facebook, Hyves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Micro)Blogs</td>
<td>Regularly updated web pages that contain user-generated blog posts,</td>
<td>WordPress, Twitter, Apple iTunes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>concentrated around a single topic of interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content aggregators</td>
<td>RSS applications that feed, bind, and filters specific content automatically</td>
<td>Huffington Post, iGoogle Reader, Feedly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to subscribed users</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content communities</td>
<td>Websites that attend to the organizing and sharing of particular types of</td>
<td>Flickr, YouTube, Quora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>media content between users</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums</td>
<td>Websites that enable users to exchange ideas and information by posting</td>
<td>Epinions, Personal democracy, Tweakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>messages, which usually are tied around specific topics and interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative projects</td>
<td>Websites that allows users to add, remove, or otherwise edit and change</td>
<td>Wikipedia, Google Docs, Google Sites</td>
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<td></td>
<td>content collectively</td>
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</table>
Appendix 5: Interview TA member organizations and non-TA member organizations.

Onderzoek naar de strategische positionering van Brancheorganisaties en de opkomst van Social Media

Achtergrondinformatie

De sterke en snelle opkomst van Social Media gaat aan geen mens of organisatie voorbij. Social Media biedt kansen voor het bedrijfsleven, maar roept ook vragen op. Vragen bijvoorbeeld over hoe Social Media de manier van samenwerken tussen organisaties kan beïnvloeden.

Brancheorganisaties zijn een vorm van samenwerking tussen organisaties. Om erachter te komen wat voor invloed Social Media heeft op de manier van samenwerken tussen organisaties, wordt middels dit onderzoek de basis gelegd voor de ontwikkeling van kennis in dit onderzoeksgebied.

Vragen

Algemeen
1. Kunt u wat achtergrondinformatie geven over de organisatie waarin u werkzaam bent?
2. Kunt u een inschatting geven van het aantal werknemers dat werkzaam is binnen deze organisatie?
3. Kunt u wat vertellen over uw functie/rol binnen deze organisatie?
4. Kunt u een inschatting geven van het aantal organisaties dat opereert in deze branche?

Samenwerking tussen organisaties
Samenwerking tussen organisaties kan voordelen opleveren, omdat het hen in staat stelt om middelen en informatie te verkrijgen die ze individueel wellicht moeilijker of zelfs helemaal niet zouden kunnen krijgen.

Definitie interorganisationele samenwerking:
“Interorganisationele samenwerking is een cooperatieve, inter-organisationele betrekking welke is overeengekomen in een continue communicatief proces, en hetgeen vertrouwt op
noch marktgebonden, noch hierarchische controlemechanismen.

5. Kunt u aangeven in hoeverre er op dit moment sprake is van een samenwerking tussen uw organisaties en een andere organisatie, bijvoorbeeld binnen de branche/sector?

6. Kunt u een concreet voorbeeld geven van samenwerking tussen uw organisatie en een andere organisatie?

7. Kunt u aangeven hoe de samenwerking op dit moment is geregeld?

8. Kunt u aangeven in hoeverre u zaken mist in de samenwerking?

>> Dit onderzoek verbindt de concepten van Social Media en Brancheorganisaties.

>> Uitleg definities.

Social Media

Onder Social Media wordt verstaan de platformen waar de gebruikers, met geen of weinig tussenkomst van een professionele redactie, de inhoud verzorgen. Onder de noemer Social Media worden onder andere weblogs, fora, sociale netwerken als Facebook, LinkedIn en Twitter geschaard.

Definitie Social Media

“Social Media zijn internet-gerelateerde applicaties, welke voortbouwen op het ideologische en technologische fundament van Web 2.0 en welke de ontwikkeling en uitwisseling van user generated content mogelijk maken.”

Brancheorganisatie

Brancheorganisaties zijn nationale organisaties die in een branche ondernemingen, ondernemers of organisaties organiseren en hun belangen behartigen, waarbij de individuele ondernemingen/ondernemers de keuze hebben zich al dan niet aan te sluiten.

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9. Kunt u vertellen wat voor uw bedrijf de belangrijkste reden was om zich aan te sluiten bij een Brancheorganisatie?

Op basis van de literatuur worden een zestal kerntaken van Brancheorganisaties onderscheiden:

- **Netwerk functie**
  Het bieden van een platform/platformfunctionaliteit. Het in contact brengen en faciliteren van dialoog en uitwisseling van informatie en middelen.

- **Dienstverlening (advies en voorlichting)**
  Marktonderzoek, individuele ondersteuning, marktontwikkelingen, voorlichting.

- **Zelfregulering**

- **Lobby en vertegenwoordigersfunctie**
  Vertegenwoordigen van de branche richting politiek (Nederland en Europa).

- **Zingeving**
  Sociale factor als het bijeenbrengen van leden en het bieden van gezamenlijk doel/streven. Ledenvergaderingen en bijeenkomsten zijn hierin belangrijk.

- **Intern organisatorische functies**
  Profiteren van kennisoverdracht in de vorm van trainingen en cursussen. Ook gezamenlijke inkoop en groepskortingen.

>> Brancheorganisatie - Een voor een nagaan en vragen

9a. Kunt u aangeven op welke manier *** op dit moment wordt ingevuld door de Brancheorganisatie?

9b. Kunt u aangeven in hoeverre Social Media wordt ingezet om *** in te vullen?

9c. Kunt u aangeven welke soorten SM er toegepast worden door uw organisatie?
9d. Kunt u aangeven in hoeverre er andere middelen worden ingezet om *** in te vullen?

>> Algemeen of specifiek per functie

10. In hoeverre is er een verschil in het toepassen van Social Media in de manier van invulling van *** (de taak) nu en vijf jaar geleden?

12a. In hoeverre ziet u Social Media in de toekomst een belangrijkere rol spelen in de invulling van *** (de taak)

12b. En zo ja, kunt u aangeven op welke manier u dit verwacht?

13. Kunt u zaken noemen die uw organisatie nu via een Brancheorganisatie regelt welke zeker niet kunnen worden overgenomen door Social Media?

14. Kunt u aangeven in hoeverre dat ook de belangrijkste overweging is geweest om lid te worden van een Brancheorganisatie?
Onderzoek naar de strategische positionering van Brancheorganisaties en de opkomst van Social Media

Achtergrondinformatie

De sterke en snelle opkomst van Social Media gaat aan geen mens of organisatie voorbij. Social Media biedt kansen voor het bedrijfsleven, maar roept ook vragen op. Vragen bijvoorbeeld over hoe Social Media de manier van samenwerken tussen organisaties kan beïnvloeden.

Brancheorganisaties zijn een vorm van samenwerking tussen organisaties. Om erachter te komen wat voor invloed Social Media heeft op de manier van samenwerken tussen organisaties, wordt middels dit onderzoek de basis gelegd voor de ontwikkeling van kennis in dit onderzoeksgebied.

Vragen

Algemeen

1. Kunt u wat achtergrondinformatie geven over de organisatie waarin u werkzaam bent?
2. Kunt u een inschatting geven van het aantal werknemers dat werkzaam is binnen deze organisatie?
3. Kunt u wat vertellen over uw functie/rol binnen deze organisatie?

>> Dit onderzoek verbindt de concepten van Social Media en Brancheorganisaties.

>> Uitleg definities.

Social Media

_Onder Social Media wordt verstaan de platformen waar de gebruikers, met geen of weinig tussenvoeg van een professionele redactie, de inhoud verzorgen. Onder de noemer Social Media worden onder andere weblogs, fora, sociale netwerken als Facebook, LinkedIn en Twitter geschaard._

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Op basis van de literatuur worden een zestal kerntaken van Brancheorganisaties onderscheiden, ik zou ze graag 1-voor-1 doorlopen met u, waarbij ik bij iedere kerntak een aantal vragen zou willen stellen.

Netwerk functie

Het bieden van een platform/platformfunctionaliteit. Het in contact brengen en faciliteren van dialoog en uitwisseling van informatie en middelen.

4a. Kunt u een inschatting geven over hoe deze functie in de meeste Brancheorganisaties tot uiting komt en wat voor een rol SM daarbij speelt?

4b. Kunt u vertellen welke mogelijkheden jullie door uw oplossingen kunnen bieden aan Brancheorganisaties op dit vlak?

4c. Kunt u vertellen welke mogelijkheden u ziet voor SM op dit vlak (nu of voor de toekomst)?

4d. Waarom hebben jullie ervoor gekozen om het op die manier in te vullen?
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Marktonderzoek, individuele ondersteuning, marktontwikkelingen, voorlichting.

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**Zelfregulering**

6a. Kunt u een inschatting geven over hoe deze functie in de meeste Brancheorganisaties tot uiting komt en wat voor een rol SM daarbij speelt?

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**Lobby en vertegenwoordigersfunctie**
Vertegenwoordigen van de branche richting politiek (Nederland en Europa).

7a. Kunt u een inschatting geven over hoe deze functie in de meeste Brancheorganisaties tot
uiting komt en wat voor een rol SM daarbij speelt?

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9d. Waarom hebben jullie ervoor gekozen om het op die manier in te vullen?

Algemeen
10. In hoeverre is er een verschil in het toepassen van SM tussen verschillende branches?

11. Is uw organisatie zelf lid van een brancheorganisatie?

12. Waarom wel/niet?

13. Hoe zet uw organisatie SM zelf in om aan kerntaken te voldoen?

14. Hoe zet uw organisatie SM zelf in om samenwerking met andere organisaties mogelijk te maken?