

Customer value in higher education social media marketing

The case of the department of Professional Learning and Development at the University of Twente

By Christina Kohnke



“Realize that the social media success equation isn’t big moves on the chess board, it’s little moves made every day that eventually add up to a major shift.”

Jay Baer

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Author:

Christina Kohnke

S1123688

Business Administration – International Management

Host organization:

Department of Professional Learning and Development

University of Twente

Postbus 217

7500 AE Enschede

www.professional-learning.nl

Graduation Committee:

1st supervisor: Dr. E. Constantinides

2nd supervisor: Dr. S. De Vries

University of Twente

Faculty Management and Governance

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Declaration

I hereby swear that I single-handedly compiled this document. I did not make use of any other sources than those listed here. Furthermore I swear that this document was never handed in to another department in this or any deviated manner. Every passage referring to or quoted from another source is identifiable as such.

Enschede, 23rd May 2012

Christina Kohnke

Management Summary

This research project has been carried out for the department of Professional Learning and Development at the University of Twente, Enschede. Professional Learning is an educational service provider which offers postgraduate education and training opportunities for professionals.

The objective of this master project was to identify how social media marketing in higher education can be used to create and strengthen prospect customer value. For Professional Learning in particular, the aim was to create additional value for its customers through social media marketing in order to attract prospect customers. To identify which particular qualities create value for prospect customers and which tactics can be used to realize these qualities, the central elements (qualities and tactics) of a social media marketing strategy in higher education have been defined first with the help of a literature analysis. The literature research revealed that interaction (through co-creation and networking tactics), knowledge (through online learning and entertainment tactics) and relationship (through social presence and dialogue tactics) are important qualities in higher education social media marketing, which will be influenced by the goals and context of organizations.

In order to determine the importance and the influence of the three social media qualities on expected customer value and the effectiveness of the different tactics to realize the qualities, an empirical study, in the form of a self administered online survey was conducted among Professional Learnings current students, alumni and prospect customers. The research showed that customers particularly value the qualities knowledge and relationship, whereas interaction was rated as less important for the expected customer value. Furthermore, it became obvious, that the two qualities can best be reached by entertainment and dialogue tactics. Moreover, the study revealed that search engines gain in importance in the search for a new educational provider.

Following the empirical study, an internal context analysis was conducted among Professional Learnings employees with the help of semi-structured interviews to determine the current situation of the organization, whether it meets the preconditions (service, organization, web 1.0 and web 2.0) for a successful social media strategy or not. The interviews revealed that overall Professional Learning fulfils the general conditions for a successful social media marketing strategy. Customers are satisfied with the quality of services and the department enjoys a good reputation. However, concerning the organization, the website and the web 2.0 applications, several actions should be taken to guarantee a successful social media marketing strategy:

- The growing number of offers and courses requires an increase of capacities in order to guarantee a smooth operation

- The interaction factors on the website and its usability for international customers should be improved
- Web 2.0 applications should be better coordinated and staff should be educated more in the field of social media marketing

Based on the research findings of the online survey and the internal context analysis, a social media strategy has been developed for Professional Learning with the goal of creating additional value for customers and thus attracting more prospect customers. In order to use social media more effectively and thus to attract and bind customers, Professional Learning should consider the following recommendations:

- Focus on the social media qualities of *knowledge* and *relationship*
- Use an *entertainment* and *dialogue tactic* to realize the social media qualities
- Focus on paid and owned media to reach earned media
- Place high emphasis to SEO and paid search activities
- Choose the right contents (political topics, opinions or topics related to their work field, news and information about Professional Learning) and tone (businesslike, but open and inviting) to approach their customers
- Clearly define the responsibilities within the department
- Identify influencers

The recommendations made in the form of a social media strategy for Professional Learning are feasible and fit the department's current situation. Moreover they are matched to the special requirements of the department's professional customers and concentrate on creating value for this particular target group. By focusing on their customers' needs and creating value for them, Professional Learning will eventually be able to reach their aim of attracting new customers and strengthening their relationship with existing students and alumni.

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List of Abbreviations

App	Mobile application
B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
EUR	Erasmus University Rotterdam
HBO	Hoger beroepsonderwijs
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MPM	Master Public Management
NSOB	Nederlandse School voor Openbaar Bestuur
PLD	Professional Learning and Development
PR	Public Relations
ROI	Return on Investment
UGC	User Generated Content
SCA	Sustainable competitive advantage
SEO	Search engine optimization
UT	University of Twente
WO	Wetenschappelijk onderwijs

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The case of the department of Professional Learning and Development at the University of Twente

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Information about Professional Learning and Development

The department of Professional Learning and Development (PLD) belongs to the school of Management and Governance of the University of Twente (UT). PLD is operating in the service sector by offering a wide range of postgraduate education and training opportunities for professionals. The offer currently includes three master programmes namely public management, risk management and environmental and energy management, which consist of a number of master classes that can also be followed separately. Courses such as 'Management Woningcorporaties' and topical lectures with diverse up-to-date topics which are part of an existing programme but which are open to a wider audience complement the offer. In addition, PLD provides diverse master classes on topics such as 'Doing business in Asia', which is offered in English or 'Management van e-governance' and also holds in-company programmes such as the 'ECIU Leadership Development Programme' for universities. Furthermore, three times a year, PLD organizes and hosts symposia on different up-to-date topics of interest which the professional students can attend to inform themselves about these latest trends and developments.

On average PLDs target customers are between 35 to 50 years old, possess a HBO (hoger beroepsonderwijs) or WO (wetenschappelijk onderwijs) diploma and are already active in professional life for on average between three to five years. PLD's customers can broadly be divided in three main groups. Even though most of the students of PLD are Dutch, there are also several international customers participating in the courses. Further it can be distinguished between public customers such as hospitals, universities or administrations and private customers from business organizations of all sectors. Depending on the courses, the target groups and distribution of students differs. While the course risk management has an almost equal share of public and private students, courses such as public management have more public students. The course 'Doing business in Asia' is characterized by its mixture of Dutch and international students belonging to both public and private sectors.

PLD is a relatively small organization with currently about nine permanent employees who are supported by four student assistants. The organization's income is generated by the registration fees of participants.

PLD's main competitors in the higher education market can be considered other Dutch and non- Dutch universities which offer comparable courses for professionals such as The Hague University of Professional Education, the Business University Nijenrode, or the Department of Postgraduate Formation of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

Especially for the popular courses such as risk management, there is a big offer from diverse universities which compete for the professional students.

The department follows market oriented strategy. PLD tries to offer its clients educational programs with added value, distinctiveness and continuity in the supply in order to distinguish from its competitors in the field of higher education.

1.2 Problem context and goal setting - Management problem

Currently PLD's marketing activities comprise the use of print media through advertisements in a few selected magazines, and which is even more the publication and presentation of its offers through brochures and flyers that are mainly used for information purposes.

Concerning online marketing, PLD makes use of listings, which are sites such as masteropleidingen.nl on which the different offerings from universities are listed and ranked. Furthermore, PLD already engages on social media sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Here, the department has its own group and in addition, an online advertisement campaign with banners has been started to promote the educational programmes and services.

However, as the Internet in general and social media in specific constantly gain in importance, PLD's management wishes to improve its online marketing strategy so as to include the social media more intensively and use it more effectively for their purposes. So far, PLD mainly uses the social media sites as advertising platforms for banners as well as a place for discussion with current students and alumni.

The main objective of PLD is to attract new customers and to create awareness for the offers and the brand in order to generate new prospect customers. Furthermore, the department would also like to strengthen the existing relationships with current customers and alumni. *It is expected that PLD can achieve both goals by creating additional value for prospect and existing customers through social media marketing.*

Although PLD has already made efforts to increase its presence on Twitter and the online community LinkedIn, with its current practices in online marketing, these goals can hardly be reached, as the strategy does not focus on creating additional value and it mainly applies to alumni and customers of the services who already know PLD. PLD's aim is not only to stay in touch with present customers but mainly to attract new prospect customers, national and international, and to increase the customer value so as to guarantee a higher customer satisfaction with PLD's services.

Overall the goal of this master thesis project is to identify how social media marketing in higher education can be used to create prospect customer value. In the following this knowledge shall be used to design a successful social media marketing strategy for PLD which creates additional value for its current and especially for prospect customers. It shall give advice on how to use social media more effectively, how to include customers and how to attract new customers and create awareness for the brand and the offers through social media to both stay in contact with alumni and existing students as well as attract new ones and generate prospects.

1.3 Research problem and research questions

The challenge of this master thesis project is to adjust PLD's online marketing strategy and activities to the current trends and developments in online marketing, especially with regards to social media and its use as a marketing tool to create customer value. In this respect, PLD should not only focus its efforts on the maintenance of current customers and alumni but should aim at the same time to use the Internet to expand its business and attract new national and also international customers for its educational programs. In order to be able to realize this task, the following research problem has been formulated:

How can PLD develop a social media strategy in order to strengthen the prospect customer value?

In order to answer and solve this research problem, six research questions have been developed:

- I. What are the elements and qualities of a successful social media marketing strategy for creating customer value in higher education institutions?
- II. What are critical trends in the external environment from PLD?
- III. What are the effects of the social media qualities on the expected customer value in higher education marketing?
- IV. Does PLD have the conditions necessary to implement a successful social media strategy?
 - (1) Are customers satisfied with the services of PLD?
 - (2) Is the organization well developed?
 - (3) Are the web 1.0 applications well developed?
- V. What are PLD's strengths and weaknesses with regards to online marketing and the organization?
- VI. How can PLD effectively attract prospect customer with the help of online marketing devices?

The first two research questions will be answered with the help of a literature review as part of the desk research. Hereby the goal is to learn about general trends in the environment which might affect educational service providers and to identify elements (qualities and tactics) which might form a part of a general online marketing strategy for such institutions. Research question III shall be answered with the help of an empirical research to determine whether the different concepts identified in the literature review are suitable for implementation among PLD's customers and how they can create customer value. Research questions IV and V then refer to an internal context analysis of PLD. They try to determine whether the department is prepared for implementing a social media strategy by analysing its strengths and weaknesses, especially with regards to online marketing. Finally, question VI shall be answered in the form of a practical online marketing strategy provided for PLD, which builds on the results of the previously conducted analyses and which helps to create additional value for customers.

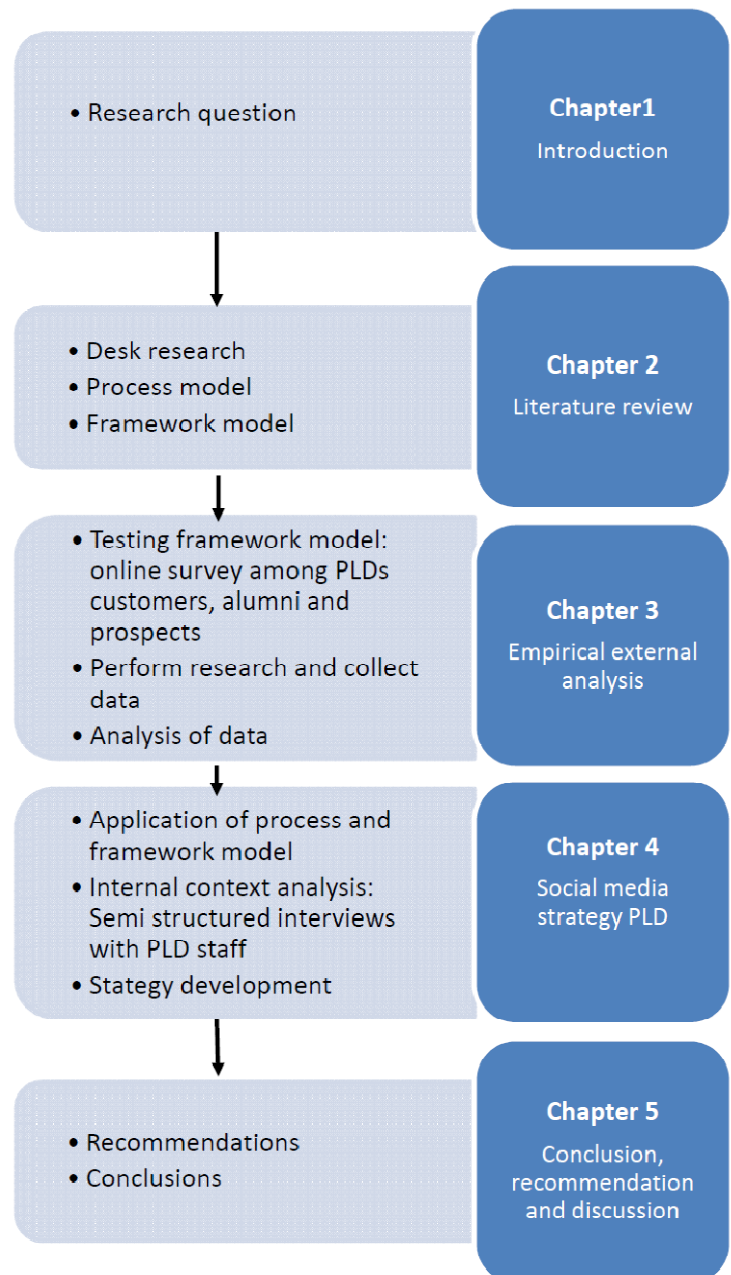
1.4 The research process

In this master thesis project, a deductive research approach is followed, which means that the research starts with theory and current knowledge which will then be tested and observed in practice. The research followed the process as shown in Figure 1. First the research problem has been formulated and a basic research question has been developed in chapter 1. Following that, a literature review is conducted in chapter 2. The review presents a process model to follow for strategy development and sets up a framework model which specifies the central elements (qualities and tactics) for creating customer value in a higher education social media marketing strategy. This provides an answer to research questions I and II.

In the following part in chapter 3, an external empirical analysis will be conducted among PLDs customers, alumni and prospects with the intention to test the framework model and to answer research question III. In chapter 4 an internal analysis will be conducted among PLDs employees in order to provide an answer to research questions IV and V and a social media strategy will be developed for PLD based on the process and framework models which have been presented and tested before.

Based on the findings of both analyses, conclusions can be drawn and concrete recommendations can be given to PLD in the form of a social media marketing strategy which creates additional value for its prospect customers. Thus finally an answer will be provided for the research question VI.

Figure 1. The research process



1.5 Relevance and justification of the research

Practical relevance

This research project is of practical relevance for the department of Professional Learning and Development at the University of Twente as it provides the organization with a customized social media strategy and guidelines how to use the different social media tools most effectively to create more value for customers and thus reach their goal of generating more

prospects. Through an empirical study among PLDs current customers, alumni and prospect customers, the organization receives a thorough understanding of their customers' social media activities and the qualities and value associated with it. Moreover, the internal analysis conducted through semi structured interviews with PLD employees provides insights into the organization as well as in employees' perceptions of social media. At the end of the thesis PLD will receive feasible recommendations that are tailored to their needs and can be implemented by the organization.

Scientific relevance

This master thesis is also of scientific relevance, as primary data has been collected from business customers in the empirical study. This has enabled insights into professionals' use of social media and Web 2.0 and especially with regards to value creation in higher education social media marketing. The research allowed a closer examination of different social media tactics and their effectiveness in realizing social media qualities, as well as the effects of the different qualities on value creation for customers. Due to the fact that social media and web 2.0 marketing still is a relatively new field that is continuously gaining in importance, scientific data about value creation for prospect customers in higher education social media marketing are rare so far. Although the recommendations given in this paper are adapted to Professional Learning and Development, the results from the empirical study might be transferred to other higher education organizations that provide education for professionals. The questions about value creation of social media activities did not include specific references to PLD, which is why the findings are not limited to the department, but can be generalized for other institutions providing higher education for professional business customers.

1.6 Research methodology

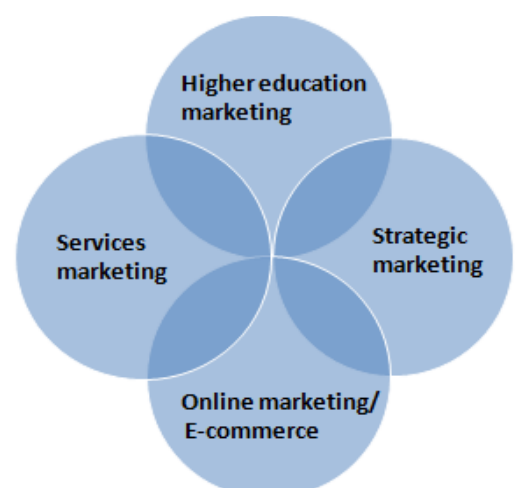
The first part of the research is rather descriptive in nature, as it describes situations and events of interest for the study (Babbie, 2010). In this case, PLD's current marketing situation is observed and described with special attention being paid to its online marketing activities and social media. In the second part an explanatory approach is taken as the research tries to explain how PLD can make effective use of social media in its online marketing strategy and how social media marketing can contribute to customer value creation in higher education.

1.6.1 Desk research

Next to collecting primary data from customers and prospect customers, desk research also formed an important part of the analysis. For the desk research, different broad areas of literature have been consulted as background information, namely higher education marketing, services marketing, strategic marketing and online marketing and e-commerce.

The review itself has been executed with the help of different models and theories, which will be presented in the following.

Figure 2. Literature fields



Theoretical models used:

- AIDA model
- Online marketing planning process (Chaffey)
- Constantinides Pyramid
- Grönroos relationship marketing framework
- Analysis of web experience

In addition to literature and theories named above, data from an earlier research about social media and its use for PLD was used for this project. This data has been obtained in the course of a Bachelor assignment which was conducted on behalf of PLD beforehand. Therefore, a questionnaire was sent to a sample consisting of 700 students, potential customers and alumni from five different educational courses of PLD drawn from the PLD Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, with a response rate of about 17% (120 responses).

1.6.2 Data collection methods

The methodology used in this paper is split in two parts, containing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

The first part forms an empirical external analysis with a survey among PLD's current and prospect customers as well as alumni. This includes professionals who are willing to continue their studies and further educate themselves. A self-administered questionnaire will be administered electronically using the Internet and completed by the respondents (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Same as with the internal analysis, also the issues to be addressed in the survey will be based on desk research.

Even though a threat of self-administered questionnaires is that they are filled in wrong or not at all, they offer the advantage that they enable the researcher to approach a bigger sample while at the same time providing greater reliability due to the fact that respondents are not influenced by the researcher (Babbie, 2010).

In the second part an internal context analysis will be conducted with the help of semi-structured interviews with PLD staff to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the department with regards to its online marketing activities.

In this method, semi-structured interviews will be held, which means that the interviews are not completely standardized. Instead the researcher has several questions and themes to be covered, which may however vary from interview to interview (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The questions to be asked in the interviews for the internal analysis will be derived from the desk research conducted previously.

This method has the advantage that it reduces the threat of receiving a 'don't know' as an answer or even no answer at all. At the same time, however, one shortcoming of a qualitative interview is the possible subjectivity of answers and measurement which may lead to a reduced reliability (Babbie, 2010). Together the two research methods will reinforce each other as they compensate for their shortcomings in order to provide valuable data for analysis.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

What are the elements and qualities of a successful social media marketing strategy for creating customer value in higher education institutions? This question (Research question I) and research question II shall be answered with the help of the following literature analysis.

For the literature review, several field of literature have been selected for analysis. In the analysis the broader concepts and strategies are considered first, followed by the more specific tactics and enablers towards the end of the literature review.

As the goal is the development of a successful social media marketing strategy for higher education institutions, strategic marketing literature about the formulation and formation of online strategies is consulted first as a starting point. In this respect, a process model for the development of strategies will be presented which will come in use in chapter four later on in the development of the social media marketing strategy. Then, the broad field of services marketing is analyzed more closely due to the fact that PLD is operating in the service sector by providing educational programmes for professionals. More precisely, PLD is operating in the higher education sector, which is why subsequently higher education marketing and following that, relationship marketing will be considered as possible strategies for PLD.

Based on the strategies which will be explained, also different tactics to realize the strategies will be presented in this review. The tactics of online learning, customer co-creation and mass customization, will be discussed with regards to their relevance for higher education institutions and the different marketing strategies.

As the issue of online marketing continuously gains in importance, in the following, the concepts of online marketing and e-commerce will be discussed in detail, including a classification of the different social media tools available and its implications for marketing. Furthermore, in connection to that, also the growing issue of mobile media is taken into account. Social media can hereby serve as an effective tool for enabling the different strategies and tactics that will be part of this literature analysis.

The objective of the literature review is to answer the question of what are the elements of a successful social media marketing strategy for creating customer value for service providers and institutions in higher education. All in all, the different literature fields presented in this review provide insights and the basic knowledge and elements that are needed to answer the question of what are the elements of a successful social media marketing strategy for creating customer value in higher education.

The result of the literature review will be the establishment of a framework model, which portrays the different strategic options that higher education institutions have in creating a social media marketing strategy. The theoretical social media strategy framework for higher education institutions can serve as a starting point/orientation for this research as well as a general guideline. Moreover, the framework will be analyzed for its meaningfulness and significance with regards to creating prospect customer value later on in chapter three.

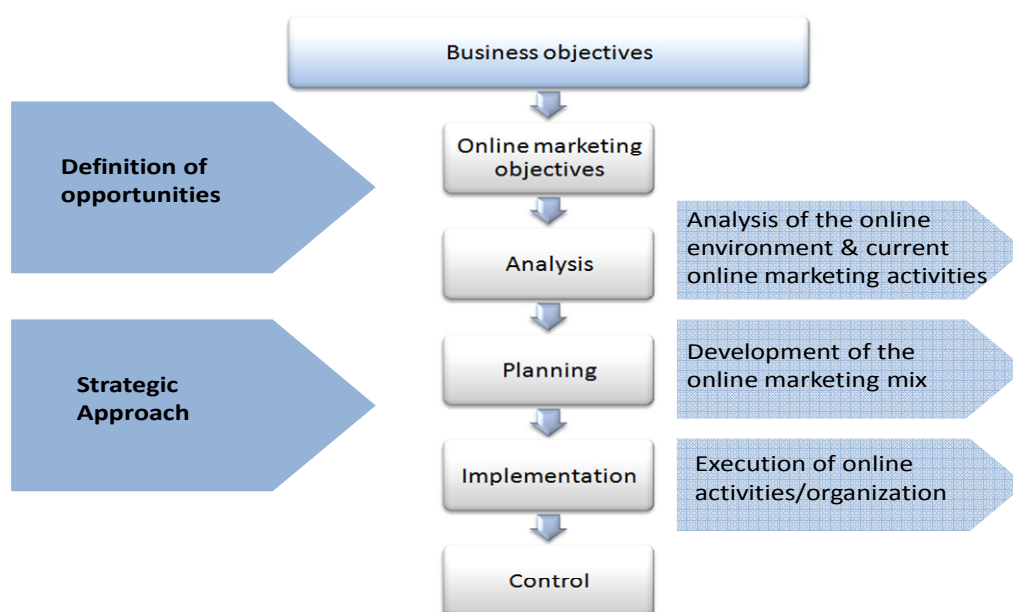
2.1 Strategic marketing, strategy formulation and customer value

“The primary purpose of marketing is to create long-term and mutually beneficial exchange relationships between an entity and the publics (individuals or organizations) with which it interacts.” (Kerin & Peterson, 2010, p. 1)

As Kerin and Peterson (2010) point out, strategic marketing management is a multifaceted task which encompasses diverse activities. It includes the definition of strategic marketing goals and the identification of strategic opportunities for growth. Based on these, strategies are formulated and, if necessary, reformulated and refined. The ultimate goal of marketing is to create a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) which differentiates organizations from their competitors. Hereby a competitive marketing strategy is considered to be “a market oriented approach that establishes a profitable position for the organization against all forces that determine competition by continuously creating and developing a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) from the potential sources that exist in a firm’s value chain” (West, Ford, & Ibrahim, 2010, p. 5). As Naumann (1995) further points out, the ability to maximize customer value is the key success factor for every business, as it helps create competitive advantage. There are many different definitions of the term customer value and a diversity of meanings at present. Woodruff (1997) defines customer value as “a customers’ perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate achieving the customer’s goals and purposes in use situations.”

One part of strategic marketing management that is increasingly gaining in importance through new technologies and developments is the field of online marketing. For the development of an online marketing strategy, Chaffey et al. (2009) propose an online marketing planning process as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The online marketing planning process



Source: Based on Chaffey et al. (2009)

The process model for online marketing planning displays the different strategic decisions that have to be made and the different actions which have to be taken in order to set up and implement an online marketing strategy.

At the beginning of the strategy development process, organizations have to define strategic business objectives in order to define their potential and provide guidance throughout the strategic planning process. The online marketing objectives should hereby be informed and derived from the overall business objectives and goals of the organization (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009). These objectives and goals help organizations define how they want to grow their business online (Chaffey, 2011). According to Constantinides (2008) and Chaffey (2011), common objectives applied by organizations for online marketing purposes include the reaching of prospect customers as well as keeping in contact with existing customers. Further objectives include a customer engagement so as to personalize the customer experience and tap their creativity. In addition, organizations often want to use online marketing to learn about their customers as well as to improve their brand image.

The next step in the strategy development process is the analysis of both, the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external trends which might be considered as either opportunities or threats for the organization (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009). For this, Chaffey et al. (2009) propose the conduction of an internal analysis and an evaluation of the organization's current online marketing practices and performance, and, following that, an external analysis, assessing the online marketplace. The internal analysis involves a review of the organization's resources and capabilities as well as an analysis of its current online marketing practices. A possible tool for internal analysis is Constantinides online marketing strategy pyramid, a method for evaluating and determining an organizations readiness for online marketing and social media marketing. The external analysis consists of a situation analysis of the organizations micro-environment, meso-environment and its macro-environment as well as the general trends in the online environment. Hereby an organizations customers, competitors, as well as intermediaries and broader influencing factors such as technological advancements and trends will be examined (Chaffey, 2011).

In the planning phase which follows, the appropriate strategies and tactics have to be selected in order to achieve the objectives set before. This stage includes selecting the correct online communications tools by defining the e-marketing mix. In the following, the details of the implementations of the strategy have to be defined. It is to decide about internal responsibilities and structures as well as about the management of resources (Chaffey, 2011).

Finally, the last part of the strategy deals with the question how the performance of online marketing activities can be controlled. The online activities have to be monitored and if necessary adapted and improved. The definition of Key Performance Indicators can help to monitor the performance and further analysis tools such as google analytics can be used to evaluate the online marketing results (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009).

The process model explained before portrays the general activities necessary in the online marketing planning process. Once the basics of strategic marketing have been discussed, however, one has to keep in mind that Professional Learning is offering educational services, and therefore the particularities and the special requirements of the services industry have to be considered separately, which is why they will be discussed in the following.

2.2 Services marketing

“Any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything.” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010)

Services are surrounding us – we use diverse services every day. Nowadays with the growing commoditization of products, services play an important role in organizations efforts to differentiate their offering from competitors (Rust & Chung, 2006). Almost all companies are increasingly focusing on providing customer services such as answering questions or providing maintenance and supplementary services such as warranties or after sales service for products today (Fisk, Grove, & John, 2008; Gilmore, 2003). In this respect, however, service companies which provide pure services as their ‘product’ and where the perceived value of the offer mainly stems from the service provided have to be distinguished and considered separately (Gilmore, 2003). Nevertheless services’ marketing is not only important for service companies but also for producers of physical goods (Fisk, Grove, & John, 2008). In services marketing the ultimate goal is to create a service package which offers more value for customers than competitors’ (Mohana Rao, 2011).

Services have several characteristics which distinguish them from physical goods. First of all, services are intangible which means that they lack a physical existence and therefore cannot be touched or seen. Next to that, services are characterized by their inseparability in that the production and consumption of the service occur at the same time. This special feature leads to a high interactivity between the customer and the service provider. Further services are highly variable. This means that it is difficult to standardize the quality of services due to the fact that the quality depends to a large extent on the interaction between the customer and the service provider. Another characteristic of services is their perishability, the fact that they cannot be stored or produced in advance, as they only exist while they are produced (Fisk, Grove, & John, 2008).

The unique features and characteristics of services request a different marketing approach as they largely determine the marketing mix used by service providers to make the offer attractive and adapt it to customers’ needs. Due to the fact that services are largely intangible, customers face difficulties in comparing and accessing their value, which leads to an increased perceived risk that has to be understood and cared for by the marketers (Gilmore, 2003). To handle this problem, marketers need to be able to deal with the intangibility by making the service as tangible as possible. This might include the physical setting, employees and techniques used by the provider (Mohana Rao, 2011).

The inseparability of service products leads to much closer contact and interaction between customers and the service providers in the production phase than with tangible products. Service providers must search for ways how to manage the role of customers in the interaction effectively (Fisk, Grove, & John, 2008). Additionally, as Gilmore (2003) points out, the fact that customers are often co-consumers of services with others poses further challenges for marketers.

Service providers have to deal with situations in which the behaviour of other customers may influence the perceived service quality. This might for example be done by providing special training for service staff to deal with those situations.

Marketers also have to consider the variability of services, which makes it difficult to standardize service offerings and provide service standards, so that service organizations often face quality control problems (Mohana Rao, 2011; Fisk, Grove, & John, 2008). Fisk, Grove and John (2008) explain that in order to control the service quality, providers should closely monitor their service performance and adapt their service offerings to create positive customer interactions and experiences.

Due to the perishability of services, marketers often face supply or demand problems. As providers lose the opportunity to generate revenue when they are not able to fully use their capacities, they place emphasis on managing the demand for their services. Possible solutions include the use of reservation systems as well as price incentives to balance and regulate the demand between peak and low demand times (Fisk, Grove, & John, 2008).

Another factor that has to be kept in mind is the lack of ownership of services. After the service has been consumed, the customer keeps nothing except the memory of it. In many cases this results in a higher customer dissonance than with physical goods, a problem that marketers must try to reduce, for example through creating a positive company image and extending the customer relationship marketing efforts (Mohana Rao, 2011).

Taking these considerations into account, in addition to the 4 P's (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) which are widely accepted and used in traditional marketing, the marketing mix for services is extended by three additional elements, namely people, process and physical service to deal with the special features of services and the challenges associated with it. The people aspect refers to the inseparability characteristic of services. How people actually perceive the service is closely linked to the interaction with the service personnel. Hiring and training the best people becomes a strategic decision effort in this case. Regarding the process, it is essential to closely watch and analyse the service processes to see if there is further room for improvements. In addition, also the tangible elements of the service delivery should be considered, as the physical evidence can affect the customer satisfaction (West, Ford, & Ibrahim, 2010).

Nowadays, the idea of services marketing and its importance goes even further. Vargo and Lusch (2004) see a change in the dominant logic for marketing from the primary exchange of tangible goods towards a focus on intangible resources, service provision and relationships. The service dominant logic challenges the traditional roles of goods and services by claiming services to be superordinate to goods and that service builds the basis for competition (Lusch, Vargo, & O'Brien, 2007).

In this context Sindhav (2011) further explains that value is not so much embedded in the products delivered, but that it is rooted in the interactions between the company and the consumer.

After the analysis of the field of service marketing, in the following subchapter, the analysis will get more specific, as it will shed light on the field of higher education marketing, a specific subfield of services marketing. As PLD is operating in the higher education industry, higher education marketing is the main discipline for the department. Regarding the literature of higher education marketing it is more specific than general services marketing literature, as the services provided and the target group addressed are more distinct than in general services marketing.

2.3 Higher education marketing

Nowadays, higher education institutions are more and more defined as operators in national as well as international markets due to a shift from higher education as a 'public good' which is public social policy rather to an economic approach and policy (Gibbs, 2002). The higher education market, in many countries has observed a trend for government deregulation, with the introduction of market mechanisms (marketisation) for the coordination of the higher education sector and a limitation of government control (Jongbloed, 2003). Further an increase in students' participation and a growing contribution of higher education to the economic success of nations and individuals has been recognized (Gibbs & Murphy, 2009). Because of these changes, more and more educational institutions recognize the need to market themselves under market conditions, with a growing competition which in many cases is a global one. In response to the increased international and national competition, marketing theories and concepts which have been effective in the business world are increasingly applied by universities in order to gain a competitive edge and a larger share of the international education market (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

Educational institutions serve as providers for educational products and services for their students, whereby the student's human capital is increased through the service; a fact which can be used for promotional purposes (Gibbs, 2002). As Gibbs (2002, p. 327) further points out, this can be explained by the assumption that "education is a form of *having* which can be managed through exchanges of goods or services and that satisfaction can be measured in what has been exchanged rather than what has happened to the parties in the engagement." Recently, higher educational institutions are confronted with higher demands and expectations of customers, to which they have to react (Gibbs & Murphy, 2009).

Due to the fact that higher education institutions provide a service and act as service sector businesses, higher education marketing is frequently defined within the frames of the service marketing definition. Education possesses all of the four main characteristics of services (intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability) (Mazzarol, 1998).

This notion of education as a service led to the fact that some researchers noted that higher education programs should therefore be marketed on the basis of service marketing (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Hereby the key characteristics of educational services should be taken into account in higher education marketing, namely that education is highly people focused and that emphasis should be paid to relationships with customers (Mazzarol, 1998). In this respect, Gibbs (2002) further suggests, that marketing of higher education institutions should be seen as a collaborative relationship based on a humanistic process of change, as those institutions aim at developing educational relationships with their customers, rather than performing transactional deals with them. In further studies, researchers argued that relationship marketing is a feasible and practical strategy for higher education marketing (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

With regards to marketing it is further expected, that integrated marketing will play an important role in higher education in the coming years, whereby the goal of reaching an integrated communication and a unified brand image requires the different areas of the university to work together (Hayes, 2007).

Due to the fact that relationship marketing was named and described as a suitable strategy and approach in higher education marketing, the concept will be observed more closely in the following, as it might present interesting options and strategic approaches for the future social media strategy for Professional Learning.

2.4 Relationship marketing

As Kotler et al. (2005, p. 476) explain, relationship marketing is “the process of creating, maintaining and enhancing strong, value-laden relationships with customers and other stakeholders.” This includes the acquisition of detailed knowledge about customers’ wants and needs in order to enable a correct and timely forecast of changing customer needs and an effective communication with customers (West, Ford, & Ibrahim, 2010).

As Grönroos (1994) explains, relationship marketing sees marketing as an interactive process in a social context in which relationship building and management form the basis for success. In a later contribution, Grönroos (2004) explains, that a successful business relationship should add value for both, the organization and the customer. Hereby especially long-term relationships are important, as they often create a continuous exchange with the customer which will in turn reduce the marketing costs per customer (Grönroos, 1990).

Concerning value creation, understanding and realizing customer value are of great importance in relationship marketing. It is argued that a firm following a relationship marketing approach creates more customer value through the approach than only through the products

themselves, as it can provide value through various other types such as informational or social value (Grönroos, 1994).

Another important aspect of relationship marketing is the fulfilment of promises, as long lasting relationships can only be maintained if promises are kept (Grönroos, 1994). As Grönroos further explains “1) establishing a relationship involves giving promises, 2) maintaining a relationship is based on fulfilment of promises, and, finally, 3) enhancing a relationship means that a new set of promises are given with the fulfilment of earlier promises as a prerequisite.” (Grönroos, 1990, p. 6)

For higher education institutions, this relationship approach implies building and maintaining valuable exchange relationships with their main customer groups, namely alumni, current students and potential future students.

Since the different broad strategic approaches and concepts possible for higher education institutions have been presented and illuminated and relationship marketing has been defined as a suitable strategic approach for PLD, the following subchapters now put a focus on the diverse tactics which might be used in the concepts to possibly create customer value. In this respect online learning will be highlighted first, as it is an important concern for the higher education sector and might therefore be interesting for PLD.

2.5 Online learning

Another recent trend in higher education is the growing importance and utilization of online learning systems and opportunities. Technology has changed the way how businesses operate all over the world. In the education sector, online education has come up as a reaction to the changing needs of traditional and newly incorporated students, as well as to meet the new requirements of educational institutions (Flavián, Longás, & Lozano, 2011).

In an effort to create an education which is more flexible and can be accessed by more people, more and more higher education institutions offer courses online, and several college presidents even predict further growth in this area (Taylor, Parker, Lenhart, & Patten, 2011).

According to Hiltz and Turoff (2005), the growing competition in higher education is a major driving force behind the need for online education, as providing high quality online education is seen as a matter to guarantee long-term organizational survival.

A fact that is of great interest for higher education institutions which offer professional learning courses is that especially older college students, who attend college when they are 30 or older have experience with and are likely to attend online learning opportunities (Taylor, Parker, Lenhart, & Patten, 2011).

According to Flavián et al. (2011), the idea of linking professional development with online learning and the concept of lifelong learning come into focus in the educational sector. However, as they further explain, in order to appeal to this potential market niche of professional students, universities have to recognize and pay attention to the fact that their engagement and presence in standard courses is difficult due to the fact that most

professionals have other responsibilities, including jobs and family care. Especially in this target group, online learning can be a good option to reach the target group and to provide additional customer value. Online learning provides students with flexibility, allowing them to integrate the education with their demands from work and family (Hiltz & Turoff, 2005).

E-learning provides geographical and temporal freedom for students - education everywhere and anytime - making education more convenient for them. Further the availability of e-learning materials provides another advantage (Cheong, 2002).

However, as Flavián et al. (2011) explain, it will be essential to implement tools which allow the gathering of data about students' real needs, as well as an investment in sufficient resources to create optimal standards in terms of usability and electronic communication for prospect students.

In addition to online learning, further possible tactics for creating customer value are the concepts of co-creation and customization which are closely related to the discipline of relationship and services marketing, as the interaction and relationships with customers are put into focus here. These tactics offer great potential for customer value creation, as they give customers the opportunity to actively participate in the design of the products in order to tailor it to their specific needs. In the following, the two concepts will be discussed in more detail.

2.6 Co-creation and customization

The shift from a goods dominant logic towards a service dominant logic of marketing as well as the shift in power from organizations to consumers also brought into focus the concepts of customization and customer co-creation.

The increased customer empowerment through technology raised consumer's desire to take a greater role in the value creation process (Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, & Singh, 2010). Companies see themselves confronted with a new type of customer, one that is better educated and possesses more resources and a stronger willingness for collaboration (Bhalla, 2011). Nowadays, customers form an active part of the market place and act as key drivers in the creation of value. They are willing to actively participate in the value creation process of products or services, and thanks to the Internet (Web 2.0) they are able to receive, exchange and discuss the information needed for being an active part in this process, opening up a dialogue with organizations which results in new products and services (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). One field in which co-creation is in wide use is the area of new product development. Here customers provide new innovative ideas for products and services that can be realized and used by the organizations (Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, & Singh, 2010).

The principle of co-creation involves both, a democratization and decentralization of value creation. Value is no longer created solely inside the organization, but in interaction with customers, through which innovative ideas are drawn and helpful insights can be gained (Ramaswamy & Guillard, 2010). Hereby, the goal of organizations is "to customize offerings, to recognize that the consumer is always a co-producer, and to strive to maximize consumer involvement in the customization to better fit his or her needs." (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 12)

Especially in Business to Business markets (B2B), a collaborative value creation is common practice for a longer time already, as B2B organizations recognize the importance of collaborative relationships with selected suppliers, customers and resellers for company success (Anderson, 1995; Bhalla, 2011).

Further the principle of co-creation is especially likely to be appealing for the services industry. Here, due to the inseparability, the customer frequently is a co-producer of the service rendered and the value created (Fisk, Grove, & John, 2008). In services industries value is co-created as there is dependence on other people's resources (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008).

Even though the concepts of collaboration and co-creation are not totally new, the combination of information and modern communication and technologies as well as the increased customer empowerment have changed the traditional roles in which firms solely held the potential and resources for new ideas and in which customers and firms were separated (Bhalla, 2011).

According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p. 8), co-creation is about "joint creation of value by the company and the customer" instead of solely "the firm trying to please the customer". As Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p. 7) further point out, "high-quality interactions that enable an individual customer to co-create unique experiences with the company are the key to unlocking new sources of competitive advantage". They further specify that "value will have to be jointly created by both the firm and the consumer".

In the co-creation process of value, customers can take different roles. As Nambisan (2002) points out, the customer can act as a resource. In this traditional role, the customer supplies information for the organizations, for example in the form of new product ideas. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) support this view in claiming that customers are more and more often seen as sources of competence. Nambisan (2002) further elaborates that next to that, customers can also act as co-creators in new product development activities, whereby their involvement can range from product design activities to product development activities. Finally, the customers act as users of the product who add value by testing and supporting the organizations products.

If applied and used correctly, customer co-creation can offer several advantages to companies which are willing to integrate their customers in the value creation processes. Especially product co-development ensures the creation of innovations that perfectly match customer's needs, and on the other hand, the customers benefit from such joint efforts by actively shaping the product's performance characteristics, so that in the end mutual beneficence can be reached through co-creation (Stump, Athaide, & Joshi, 2002). It is very likely that the ideas generated by consumers more closely resemble the needs of fellow customers and therefore increase the chances for new product success (Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, & Singh, 2010). Gassmann, Kausch and Enkel (2010, p. 44) further suggest that "customers know what they want and need and thus guarantee that new products developed accordingly will satisfy the market. At the same time, customers constitute a reliable buyer potential."

Furthermore an early integration of customers might reduce the risk of having to make changes to the final product and thus it prevents late adaptation costs and a delay in market entry (Gassmann, Kausch, & Enkel, 2010). Moreover, the need for shorter times to market new products and the possibility to share the risks with customers are key drivers for co-creation and joint product development activities for organizations (Wagner & Hoegl, 2006).

Despite the benefits that customer co-creation can offer, businesses might face several challenges. Involving customers in new product development activities is likely to increase the level of uncertainty. Organizations have to find new methods and ways how to monitor and cope with the changing processes. In addition, an education of customers might be necessary, which can lead to increased project costs and possible delays (Nambisan, 2002). In addition, growing co-creation efforts and an intensified customer relationship might increase the dependence on customers and even lead to a loss of knowledge, as organizations have to open up and share their knowledge with consumers (Gassmann, Kausch, & Enkel, 2010).

Next to co-creation, also offering variety is critical to creating value for customers, as customers become more and more demanding. Mass customization offers a way to react to customers' individual needs while maximizing cost efficiency (Piller, Moeslein, & Stotko, 2004). As Duray, Ward, Milligan and Berry (2000) point out, mass customization is a phenomenon which allows a combination of the uniqueness of products in craft manufacturing with cost-efficient manufacturing techniques of mass production. This enables customers to purchase a customized product for the lower cost of a mass-produced item. For mass customization, flexibility, timeliness and variety are essential. Organizations can determine what customers really want and respond quickly by an individual offering at the cost of standardized products (Peters & Saidin, 2000). The underlying motivation for mass customization builds the attempt to serve the heterogeneous customer base which is characterized through a growing individualization of demand (Piller, Moeslein, & Stotko, 2004).

Modern manufacturing technologies such as flexible manufacturing systems and modular product structures enable mass customization as they decrease the tradeoff between variety and efficiency for organizations (Ahlström & Westbrook, 1999). According to Da Silveira et al. (2001), mass customization can take place at various points along the value chain, ranging from manufacture and design to sales and delivery.

In service industries, such as the higher education sector, service providers should take into account and pay attention to the special characteristics of services. The variability of services, for example can provide organizations with benefits, as it can be used to suit customers' needs. Same is true for the intangibility, whereby ongoing services are likely to be adapted and modified through the learning relationship formed between the service supplier and the customer, a regeneration which can result in expanding the scope of services offered (Peters & Saidin, 2000). Further, as Peters and Saidin (2000) explain, with regards to modularization of services, dealing with non-tangible offerings simplifies the implementation of mass customization, since they allow for better collaborative customization opportunities as

compared to physical products, which is why mass customization should also be considered by higher education institutions.

Co-creation, customization and social media

Evidence suggests, that customers do not only use social media to interact with their friends and share information, but that they increasingly search for an interaction and engagement with organizations through social media (Bhalla, 2011).

The modern technologies and the emergence of Web 2.0 and social media allowed for a better communication and interaction between organizations and their customers. The increased interactivity and personalization enabled and facilitated the process of co-creation. Social media sites further promote consumer interaction which enhances the value of co-creation (Sindhav, 2011).

More and more companies recognized the value that a stronger customer involvement can offer. They try to exploit customer creativity for advertising and product evaluations as customers tend to trust peers more than expert opinions. Therefore those advertisements are perceived to be more credible and thus more effective. In addition, companies increasingly use consumer generated content as source for innovation. Therefore they include customers into their product development processes and ask them to evaluate products created by other customers. This way customer relationships and loyalty are strengthened and the new product development costs and time-to-market can significantly be reduced (Constantinides, Romero, & Gómez Boria, 2008).

While looking at the diverse tactics presented before, it already became obvious, that social media can be an effective tool for enabling the diverse tactics. Therefore, in the following, the new technologies, its definitions and uses, as well as its scope of applications will be observed more closely.

2.7 Online marketing/ E-commerce

With the emergence of the Internet and the advanced information technology, several changes appeared with regards to globalization, competition, as well as how people communicate and how information is shared. At an increasing rate, business processes and the management of business relations are conducted online.

2.7.1 Social media

“It took 38 years for the radio to attract 50 million listeners, and 13 years for television to gain the attention of 50 million viewers. The Internet took only four years to attract 50 million participants, and Facebook reached 50 million participants in only one-and-a-half years.” (Nair, 2011, p. 46)

Even though it is not a new phenomenon, the term social media came to wide usage with the increased popularity of social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The advancements in technology led to the subsequent emergence of Web 2.0 (second generation of Internet-based applications). In 2005, Tim O’Reilly (2005) coined the term ‘Web 2.0’ and described it as a medium that has the power to exploit the joint intelligence and wisdom of customers. While traditional Internet Web sites in Web 1.0 only allowed for one-way communication through static web sites, Web 2.0 makes it possible to share information, link with others, collaborate, as well as it facilitates the creation of user generated content (UGC). UGC means all forms of contents which have been created by users and which are published and shared by them through Web 2.0 (Kreutzer & Hinz, 2010).

In this respect, control can be considered one main characteristic of Web 2.0, as consumers can actively participate in and control the generation and sharing of information (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson, & McKenzie, 2008). Constantinides and Fountain (2008, p. 232) defined 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.” According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), the Web 2.0 serves as a basis for the development and expansion of social media.

The continuous socialization of the Internet is considered to be one of the major concerns in present time. Research demonstrated that especially social media has strongly impacted business at rapid speed (Barnes & Mattson, 2009). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) defined social media 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.” Nair (2011, p. 45) further emphasizes that the core of social media “is about relationships and connections between people and organizations.” As Constantinides and Fountain (2008) point out, social media and Web 2.0 have significantly changed the business landscape with regards to consumer behaviour and led to a shift in power from the organizations to the consumers. Social media has revolutionized the online behaviour, a phenomenon that Li and Bernhoff (2008, p. 11) refer to as “groundswell - A social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from

traditional institutions like corporations.” Information is easily and freely available on the Internet and customers can actively create and share information which leads to a strong customer empowerment (Constantinides, Romero, & Gómez Boria, 2008).

2.7.2 Classification of social media

Twitter, Flickr, Facebook and LinkedIn immediately come into people’s minds when they think about social media. However, the concept of social media is much broader and includes several different categories and applications. Social media and Web 2.0 applications can be classified into different categories. A classification is useful as it enables a better understanding of the marketing possibilities of the different applications. Constantinides and Fountain (2008) propose a classification which divides the application types in five main categories:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Web logs | Web logs are online journals such as www.blogger.com , where “an individual records opinions, links to other sites, etc. on a regular basis” (Oxford Dictionaries). Usually blogs are produced and maintained by one or a few authors and they are open to the public for reading (Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006). Blogs can present themselves in different ways, such as in the form of personal diaries or they can include summaries of information on specific topics (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). |
| 2. Social networks | Social networks are applications which allow users to create personalized public profiles within a system, connect with other users who can access the profile, communicate with other users, exchange content and view their connections (e.g. www.facebook.com ; www.linkedin.com) (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Boyd & Ellison, 2008). |
| 3. (Content) communities | Content communities enable the sharing of media content between users. Members can share content or comment on content shared by other users. This content can be in the form of text (e.g. Wikipedia.com), videos (e.g. www.youtube.com), photos (e.g. www.flickr.com), or other media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). |
| 4. Forums | Forums are Internet message boards, which promote the exchange of ideas and information around special topic of interest, such as www.epinions.com (Oxford Dictionaries ; Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). |
| 5. Content aggregators | Content aggregators are applications such as www.yahoo.com which allow the users to customize the content they wish to access by making use of Real Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary (RSS) (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). |

With regards to the choice between the different social media applications, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) point out, that it is essential to make a reasonable and sensible selection as an engagement in social media requires active participation and efforts from a business, which should be well elaborated and thought through. The social media applications each differ in their suitability for different marketing activities and for reaching different marketing related goals (see Table 1). As Constantinides (2008) explains, there are both active and passive ways for marketers to influence the decision-making of their consumers with the help of Web 2.0 applications. Passively organizations can use social media as a means to listen to their customers and receive valuable market information. Often users speak about their experiences with special products and firms in online communities, blogs or forums. Observing customer’s social media environment enables companies to learn more about their customers’ perceptions of their brand and products (Constantinides E. , 2008).

In an active approach, organizations can use social media as a tool for direct marketing and Public Relations (PR). In addition, it can exert influence on customer’s behaviour and allows for a more personalized offering (Constantinides E. , 2008). Constantinides (2008) defined and identified which social media applications are suitable for reaching the different strategic marketing goals and objectives:

Table 1. Web 2.0 Applications as marketing tools

	<i>Passive</i>	<i>Active</i>			
Marketing objective	Listening- in	PR and Direct Marketing	Reaching the new influencers	Personalizing customer experience	Tapping customer creativity
Application type					
Web logs	XXX	XXX	XXX		X
(Content) communities	XX	X		XXX	XXX
Social networks	X	XX		X	XX
Forums/ Bulletin Boards	XXX	X	X	XX	XXX
Content Aggregators		XX	XXX		

XXX: very suitable, XX: suitable. X: suitable sometimes

Source. Constantinides et al. (2008)

2.7.3 Social media marketing

These changes in the use of media also impact the marketing strategies and branding activities of organizations (Kreutzer & Hinz, 2010). The emergence of social media applications have significantly changed the way organizations communicate with their customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). As Drury (2008) points out, social media has truly revolutionized traditional marketing. He explains that “marketing is no longer one dimensional; it is now a two-way process engaging a brand and an audience”, which is about discussing and exchanging thoughts rather than simply providing messages and ideas (Drury, 2008, p. 275). As many organizations’ customers are actively participating on social media sites, possibly even discussing about the brands and offers of the organization, an engagement in social media seems to be a good strategic decision for many companies (Kreutzer & Hinz, 2010). Web 2.0 and social media offer new challenges but also new opportunities for organizations. As Constantinides and Fountain (2008) point out, traditional media and established marketing practices are decreasingly influencing consumers in their behaviours. Customers perceive social media as a more trustworthy source of information than the traditional advertising and communication vehicles used by organizations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). As Mangold and Faulds (2009) further point out, marketers are losing control, as they are unable to control the content and information that is passed between consumers through social media. On the other hand, social media provide marketers with several advantages. They enable organizations to stay in touch with their customers, find out about their needs and offer opportunities for a personalized interaction that will strengthen the customer-supplier relationship (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). Especially as the lines of traditional marketing tools are getting less clear, social media offers the possibility for direct and personal customer contact that contributes to a trustful relationship (Drury, 2008).

Many businesses recognized the importance of being present at social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook. However, organizations still face the challenge to create an engagement that customers consider worth following. Often organizations approach this issue hastily without conducting an analysis of their target group and their needs with regards to online marketing and social media first (Solis, 2011). It is to keep in mind, that any engagement in social media requires detailed examination of the diverse social media tools and sites, an analysis of the prerequisites for success as well as a solid planning (Kreutzer & Hinz, 2010). Solis (2011) further stresses that in order to be successful in online marketing, organizations need to develop a solid strategy that is in line with the brand strategy and the organization’s overall communication strategy. Further companies should understand, that “social media is not corporate media” (Foremski, 2011). As Foremski (2011) points out, the attempt to transform social media into a marketing channel for the business, might lead to a loss of insight in consumer’s thoughts, as there is no more listening. However, as Solis (2011) explains in this respect, listening to customers, learning from them and adapting to their needs is where actual value is created through social media, and creating value will be essential for social media in the future. Nair (2011) further proposes that it is important to understand what customers are doing with social media and to adapt the organizational strategy to theirs.

In this respect, attention should also be paid to the different channels used to enter social media sites. These range from personal computers to laptops and tablet PCs. Of growing importance hereby are also smart phones, which is why mobile media marketing will be discussed more closely in the following.

2.7.4 Mobile media marketing

Another recent development is the growing number and influence of mobile phones, smart phones and mobile applications (Apps). The advertising industry all over the world has recognized the importance and opportunities that mobile phones offer as channel for marketing communication (Bauer, Barnes, Reichardt, & Neumann, 2005). The growing importance of mobile phones and the enabled high-performance data transmission increases organization's interest in mobile marketing (Koch & Theuner, 2010). While the mobile communication market almost reached its potential for further growth, the usage of mobile Internet is rapidly growing (Bauer, Dirks, & Bryant, 2008). Haghirian, Madlberger and Tanuskova (2005, p. 2) describe mobile marketing as "using interactive wireless media to provide customers with time and location sensitive, personalized information that promotes goods, services and ideas, thereby generating value for all stakeholders."

According to Hinrichs and Lippert (2002), mobile marketing can be classified into three different forms. First of all, content oriented marketing, which focuses on the communication of advertising messages, for example through sponsored SMS. Transaction oriented marketing mainly concentrates on selling mainly standardized products through mobile devices. A third form of mobile marketing is response oriented marketing which includes interactions between the communicator and recipient.

Mobile marketing allows organizations to create and maintain a reciprocal communication between the firm and the consumers (Haghirian, Madlberger, & Tanuskova, 2005). Mobile media is highly ubiquitous, which allows organizations to interact and approach customers for different purposes and at different times, whenever there is a need to. In addition to the ubiquity, mobile media is characterized by a location sensitivity, which provides companies with the opportunity to offer location- based services and applications. These characteristics make mobile media a highly personal and interactive marketing tool (Stafford & Faber, 2005). For many customers, mobile devices are highly personalized and therefore constitute part of their identity. This offers marketers the opportunity to customize their messages and offerings towards customers needs and thus approach customers in a highly individual way which strengthens the relationship (Haghirian, Madlberger, & Tanuskova, 2005).

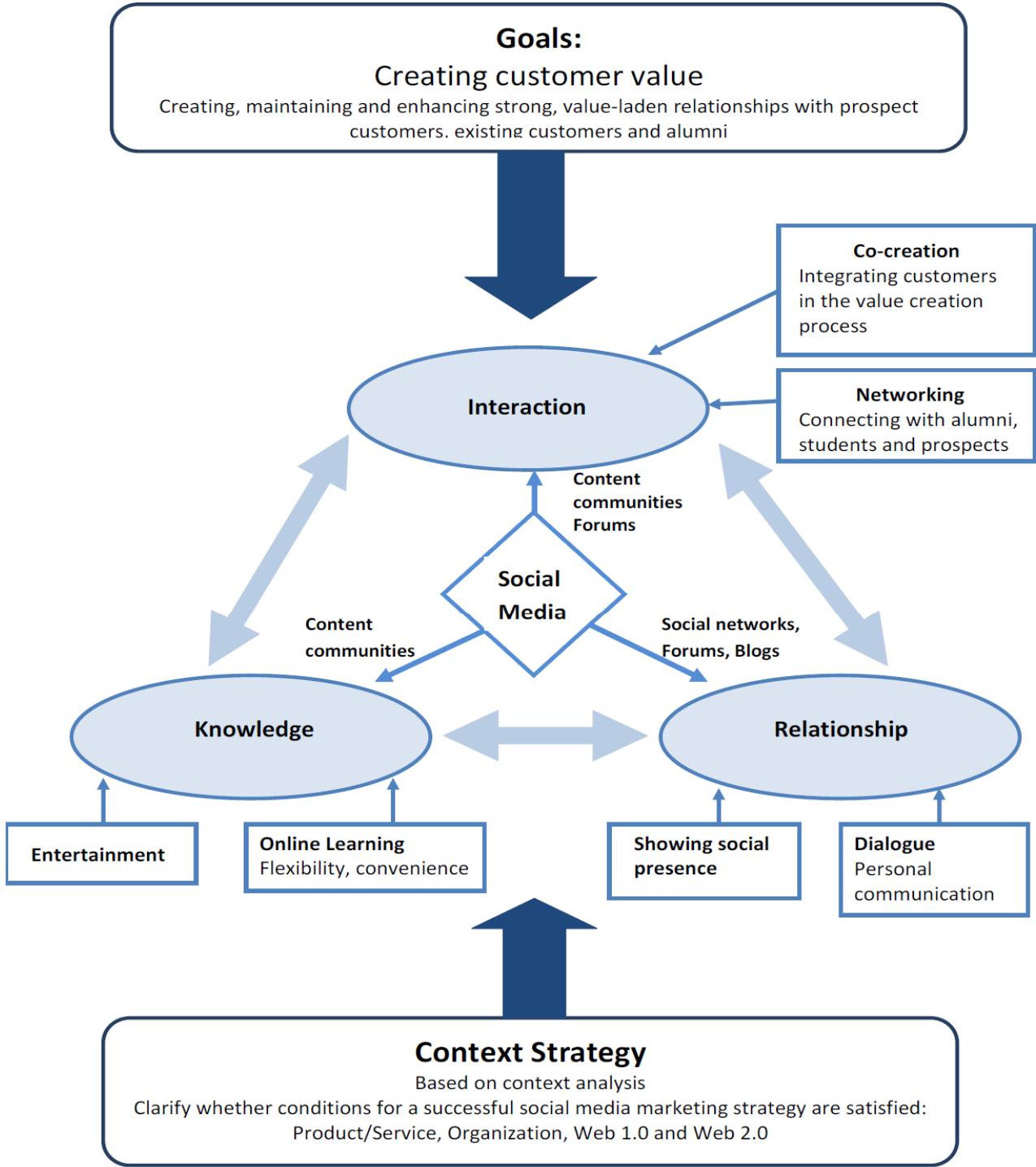
Discernible customer profiles and the possibility to react directly to concrete customer situations allow organizations to build up and maintain specific and interactive customer relationship (Koch & Theuner, 2010). Due to the technical developments and progress, social media applications are also no longer tied to computers or laptops, but are usable through mobile devices such as smart phones (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

One of the challenges businesses face with regards to mobile media however, is the rapid speed with which developments in the dynamic industry take place (Bauer, Dirks, & Bryant, 2008).

2.8 Strategic framework – Central elements of social media marketing strategies for creating customer value in higher education marketing

As a result of the literature review, the following descriptive model in form of a strategic framework for social media in higher education marketing has been developed:

Figure 4. Elements of online marketing strategies for higher education institutions



Source: Based on Grönroos (2004)

This framework model, as derived from the review of literature, provides an answer to the question of what are the elements of a successful social media marketing strategy for creating customer value in higher education. Generally this framework model portrays the basic elements (qualities and tactics) of social media marketing strategies for creating customer value in higher education institutions. It describes possible choices that higher education institutions can make with regards to their social media strategies. As the literature review revealed, a relationship marketing approach is a suitable and reasonable strategy for higher education institutions. This is why the framework model is based on a concept from relationship marketing, proposed by Grönroos (2004), which serves as the basis for the general online marketing strategy. The model has been adapted to match the particular needs of higher education institutions and PLD in particular. It includes a combination of different interaction, relationship, as well as knowledge social media qualities for customer value creation.

The conceptual model illustrates the different social media qualities and tactics which can be used by higher education institutions to improve their social media marketing strategy and create more value for its customers. Hereby organizations first have to make choices about the goals they want to achieve, in this case the aim of creating more value for customers. Next, it has to be decided which qualities they want to focus on for creating more customer value and which tactics can help to realize the qualities. Throughout the whole process, however, it is to keep in mind, that all choices are influenced by the chosen goals and the context strategy in which the organization is. Therefore a context analysis has to be conducted first, which determines whether the organization has the conditions (product/service, organization, Web 1.0 and Web 2.0) necessary for a successful social media marketing strategy. Within the process, organizations have to decide which tactics to pursue in order to reach the qualities which are most important for their customers and make effective use of social media. The whole procedure is an iterative process between goals, context, social media qualities and tactics organizations face.

The interconnected social media qualities of 'interaction', 'relationship' and 'knowledge' build the core of the model. They represent the value for customers and can be used as a measure for customer value. The three qualities can be realized with the help of an integration of the different tactics of customer co-creation, networking, online learning, entertainment, dialogue and showing social presence as well as with the help of social media which serve as enablers with the diverse tools for implementing and realizing the different tactics. Also the different tactics are interrelated. Some of them can affect more than only one quality.

Concerning the social media quality of interaction, it is to note, that the relationship proceeds in a process of mutual interaction in which the supplier and the customer have different contacts. In order to be successful, the supplier has to adapt its own resources and processes to the customer's value creation processes (Grönroos, 2004). In this context, the concepts of co-creation and networking present possible tactics for customer interaction and customer engagement.

The aim of the quality of relationship is to create a reciprocal communication in form of a customer-supplier dialogue, whereby the communication is rather one-sided and the customer remains rather passive. A goal which can be reached with the help of dialogue and social presence tactics, enabled and executed through the diverse social media access points and marketing devices such as tablet PCs and smart phones.

As Grönroos (2004) further explains, customer value is created in diverse processes over time. Offering knowledge through online learning opportunities and entertainment tactics for customers might increase the perceived customer value and thus strengthen the customer relationship.

The different social media tools can be used as enablers for the implementation of the different tactics. As Constantinides et al. (2008) point out, a personalization of the customer experience (e.g. through online learning or entertainment tactics), which creates value for and closer ties with customers, can be reached by engaging on content communities, whereby communication, interaction and customer feedback can be reached. In order to tap the customer's creativity and create customer goodwill, for example through co-creation practices, discussion forums, and content communities present opportunities, as well as social networks. Suitable tools to improve the dialogue with customers and enhance communication can be an engagement in social networks as well as the establishment and/or contributions in topic related blogs and forums.

The result of the choices for social media qualities, tactics and social media enablers based on goals and the context strategy will be a social media strategy based on the needs of the situation, so as to create value for the organizations' customers.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the existing literature on the subjects of strategic marketing, services marketing, higher education marketing and online marketing in order to provide an answer to research questions I and II. Summarizing the results from the literature review conducted a process model for the planning of online marketing was presented and a framework model was established based on the concept of relationship marketing.

In summary, the key findings of the literature review are:

- For higher education institutions, a relationship marketing approach is appropriate
- Creating value will be essential for social media in the future
- 'Interaction', 'relationship' and 'knowledge' are important qualities in relationship marketing for creating customer value
- Co-creation, online learning, entertainment, dialogue, social presence and networking are possible tactics to achieve those qualities

- The diverse social media tools can be used as enablers for the implementation of the different tactics
- Choices (for qualities and tactics) are influenced by the chosen goals and the context strategy of the organization

Providing an answer to Research question I, it can be concluded that the central elements of a successful social media marketing strategy for creating customer value in higher education are the social media qualities (interaction, knowledge and relationship) and tactics (networking, co-creation, entertainment, online learning, showing social presence and dialogue), which will be influenced by the goals and context of organizations.

Throughout this thesis, the framework model, as derived from the literature review, serves as a basis for answering the main research question of how PLD can develop a social media strategy in order to strengthen the prospect customer value. In the following chapter three, the framework model will be tested for its appropriateness in order to determine which qualities provide most value for customers and which tactics are best to realize the qualities. In the following chapter four, the framework model, as tested and verified in chapter three, will be implemented with the help of the process model (see Figure 3) described before. Therefore, goals will be defined and a context analysis will be conducted and based on those findings qualities and tactics will be chosen for a successful social media marketing strategy for PLD that creates prospect customer value.

Chapter 3

Empirical external analysis

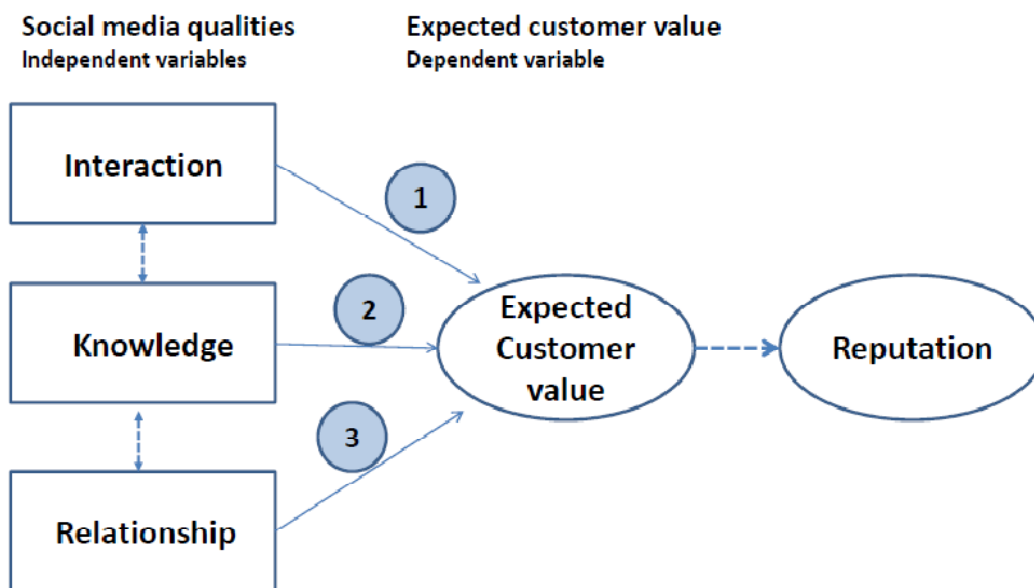
In chapter 3, an empirical external analysis will be conducted which will help to provide an answer to research question III: *What are the effects of the social media qualities on the expected customer value in higher education marketing?*

In this chapter, the framework model developed as a result of the literature analysis in chapter 2.8 will be tested for its meaningfulness and appropriateness in order to determine whether all of the social media qualities presented (interaction, knowledge and relationship) create value for customers and to which extent. Moreover, apart from defining the importance of the different qualities, also the tactics are observed more closely, to evaluate which tactics are best suited to realize the qualities.

3.1 Conceptual model

In the following, the framework model as illustrated in chapter 2.8 has been translated into a conceptual model which can be analyzed in the course of an empirical analysis conducted in this chapter.

Figure 5. The conceptual model



The independent variables in this research model are the social media qualities explained in the framework model, which can broadly be summarized as interaction (through co-creation, customization and networking tactics), knowledge (through online learning, entertainment tactics) and relationship (through dialogue and social presence tactics).

In the research it shall be analyzed in how far the different social media qualities as presented in the general online marketing strategy for higher education institutions can influence the expected customer value (dependent variable). It is assumed that the different qualities enabled through the social media tactics, will exert an influence on the dependent variable of

expected customer value. Further it is assumed that an increased customer value will have a positive effect on the organizations reputation (conversion rate, speed of education, etc.) which will lead to higher customer attraction rates and closer customer relationships. In addition it is believed that the three qualities are not independent and can influence each other.

If applied correctly, the tactics of co-creation, mass customization and networking, which are closely linked, can lead to the creation of the before mentioned quality of interaction. Co-creation and customization require a close customer contact, interaction and dialogue, through which the customer relationship can be strengthened. The fact that customers can participate in the design process of products and services creates a bigger variety for customers and leads to customized offers which creates value and possibly binds the customers closer to the company. In addition, this form of added value can attract new customers to the company.

Hypothesis 1: Interaction is positively related to expected customer value in social media higher education marketing

Knowledge through online (or distance) learning and entertainment, for example enabled through content communities, serves as another tactic for effective online marketing. It offers customers flexibility and increases their convenience, as well as it offers them entertainment, through which value is added to the existing offers. Through this additional value, existing customers might further be tied to the company and their relationship will be further strengthened.

Hypothesis 2: Knowledge is positively related to expected customer value in social media higher education marketing

As indicated in the conceptual model, it is assumed that web based relationship marketing, for example realized through social networks, blogs, or mobile media will lead to a more personal and interactive communication with customers. This dialogue can lead to a better mutual understanding which will ultimately strengthen the customer-supplier relationship and create customer value.

Hypothesis 3: Relationship is positively related to expected customer value in social media higher education marketing

In addition to the hypothesis stated above, two propositions (marked with dotted lines) have been made, which however will not be tested in this research but might be an interesting subject for further research.

A relationship is assumed between the three social media qualities. They are not seen in isolation, but it is expected that the three qualities of interaction, knowledge and relationship can influence each other.

Proposition 1: *The social media qualities interaction, knowledge and relationship are interrelated*

Furthermore, as former studies showed, customers' willingness to purchase a good or service is influenced by the perceived value of the product or service (Chen & Dubinsky, 2003). It is anticipated that in higher education, the perceived customer value also has a positive influence on the organizations reputation and with that on customer attraction and their willingness to purchase the good or service, which leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 2: *Perceived customer value is positively related to reputation*

3. 2 Research methodology

3.2.1 Research method: Online survey

For the empirical survey analysis, an online survey in the form of a self-administered questionnaire has been used, whereby the questionnaire is completed by the respondents (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The survey was Internet based, which means that it was administered by mail, posting the web link of the questionnaire.

Compared to other research methods, the online questionnaire has clear advantages for this survey research. First of all, it is expected that this method can help to increase the response rate of the survey, due to the relative ease of participation. Completing and returning the questionnaire is facilitated for the respondents so that they were more likely to participate. In addition, as the respondents are geographically spread all over the Netherlands and in bordering countries (e.g. Belgium, Germany), an online survey allows the researcher to approach all potential respondents, no matter how geographically dispersed they are.

Before actually starting the online survey, the questionnaire has been tested by different independent people to determine the time they need to complete the survey and to see whether the questions are clear and understandable.

The evaluation and processing of the data from the returned questionnaires has been done with the help of the statistical program SPSS.

A template of the questions asked in the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

3.2.2 Operationalization

In a next step, the main independent and dependent variables, as defined above are translated into factors which can be observed in the empirical study.

Independent variables

The independent variables are the social media qualities of interaction, knowledge and relationship, which are supposed to have a positive influence on the expected customer value. The operationalization of the different independent variables is presented in the table below:

Table 2. Operationalization of independent variables

Variable	Indicator	Questions
Interaction	Co-creation	Customer contributions Referential statements and agreements Participation in the design of the education
	Networking	Connecting with alumni and/or other students Discussions
Knowledge	Online Learning	Online courses Digital study material
	Entertainment	Learning videos and presentations
Relationship	Dialogue	Regular contact with the school Conversation quality Frequency of conversations
	Social Presence	Visibility of service provider on social media sites

Dependent variable

The operationalization of the dependent variable ‘customer value’ is based on the literature on the uses and gratifications theory, which argues, that the “selection of media and content, and the uses to which they are put, are considerably influenced by social role and psychological predisposition” (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973, p. 165).

A study conducted in 2009 to examine the gratifications of Facebook users, found four primary needs for participating in social networks and on social media sites. These are socializing (e.g. support from others, belong to a community, stay in touch with people), entertainment (e.g. entertaining, exciting), self-status seeking (e.g. group participation, status) and information (e.g. information about products, events) (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Where possible, it was tried to develop the same values for all three qualities, in order to be able to better compare them.

These results were taken as a basis for the development of possible customer values derived from the three social media qualities of interaction, knowledge and relationship, which will be presented in the following:

Table 3. Operationalization of dependent variables

Variable	Indicator	Questions
Customer value	Value of interaction	Satisfaction with service Unique offer Personal recognition Service satisfies customers needs Trust Confidence in the school
	Value of knowledge	Temporal flexibility Convenience Personal development Service satisfies customers needs
	Value of relationship	Confidence in the school Trust Personal recognition Interest and curiosity for the organization

3.2.3 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire has been based on the literature review and the resulting framework and conceptual model. It should determine how PLD’s customers perceive the influence of the qualities of interaction, knowledge and relationship on the value of their education.

For the questions, formats were chosen which provide a clear insight as they offer the respondents a wider list of answers such as multiple choice questions and matrix questions. This type of question asks several questions that have the same set of answer category. For the matrix questions in this questionnaire a 5 point Likert scale is used (Agree- Disagree). This scale has the advantage that it uses space effectively and that for respondents it is easier to answer a complete set of questions. Furthermore a Likert scale enables a better comparability of answers (Babbie, 2010). In addition, many questions contained a blank box for additional or deviating answers, allowing an even closer investigation and more detailed answers.

The whole survey is based on a combination of questions grouped into the following main parts:

A) General information

The first part of the questionnaire contains single and multiple choice questions regarding gender, age, education and employment of respondents, in order to make sure that the sample population corresponds with the target population. The questions about the general

information are identical with the ones of a former study among PLD students and prospects. This is to be better able to compare results. In addition to the general questions, part 1 also asks two questions about which media channels potential students prefer to use to take notice of education institutions. This information is especially valuable when it comes to designing a strategy for PLD with which the department wants to attract new students.

B) Social media usage

In the second part, respondents are asked to indicate their usage of social media and the Internet, such as which access points to the Internet they use most, which actions they do most frequently, etc. This information might be valuable for the development of a concrete social media strategy later on. Apart from the general questions asked, question 14 and 15 directly refer to PLD and shall determine the success of PLDs recently launched banner campaign.

Question 12 is of special importance, as it asks respondents to name their motivations to use social media sites and especially social networks. These motivations might be linked to the expected customer values asked about in a later part of the survey, so that linkages can be made here. In general the questions in this part are based on former studies about social media use. In addition, for question 12, the uses and gratifications theories have been consulted.

C) Interaction, knowledge and relationship

Parts 3-5 deal with the social media qualities of interaction, knowledge and relationship and their influence on expected customer value. As explained above, the matrix questions used here are all based on the uses and gratifications theories. For all qualities two questions were asked, namely:

- What is the qualities expected effect on decision making in the choice of a school?
- What is the qualities influence on the expected customer value?

These should determine in how far the different qualities influence the expected customer value and in addition in how far the different qualities influence the customers' decision on a school. For the qualities of interaction and knowledge, it was further examined in how far customers are already experienced with interaction and with distance learning to determine whether those qualities are applicable for PLD's customers.

3.2.4 Sampling

For the online survey, purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method was used. This means, that cases are selected, which best enable the researchers to answer the research question (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). In this case PLD's target group, who can provide answers on the research question how the different social media qualities (interaction, knowledge and relationship) influence their perception of the value of the education. When PLD knows what its customers value most, they can adapt their online marketing strategy towards their needs and thus make it more effective.

The target population for this survey consists of professionals mainly between 35 to 50 years old, with a HBO or WO diploma, or an equivalent education. Due to the fact that many educations offered by PLD are aimed at the public sector, this is where many customers work. However, as the social media strategy shall be aimed at all potential and current customers as well as alumni, the survey population contains customers from all educations offered by PLD.

In order to be able to compare results of this study with a former study conducted on social media use on behalf of PLD, the same sampling frame (list of customers, alumni and prospects of PLD) was chosen, which was taken from PLDs CRM database. This sampling frame consists of all those individuals within the target population of PLD, defined before.

The quantitative online study was set up and the link for the online survey was send to a total of 700 participants, including current and prospect students of PLD and alumni from 5 different educations. In order to increase the response rate, after two weeks a reminder with the link has been posted on LinkedIn in the PLD group, which contains the same members as the sampling frame and the list of mail addresses. The survey was online in the period between 29th of January and the 24th of February, giving the sampling frame enough time to fill in the questionnaire. A total of 103 respondents filled in the online survey (14.71 %). However, some respondents did not fill in the questionnaire completely, which is why they were replaced case wise. This leads to a final response rate of 11.71 % (82 participants).

As compared to the survey conducted among PLDs prospect and current customers before, this survey received a lower response rate. In the survey conducted before, the response rate lay at 17.2 %. The lower response rate in this survey might be explained by the fact that this time the questionnaire was in English, while the former survey was in Dutch, what was probably more convenient for the mainly Dutch customers of PLD.

All in all, the sample is considered to be representative, as the statistics we compute from the sample reflect the corresponding parameters accurately.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Sample and respondent characteristics

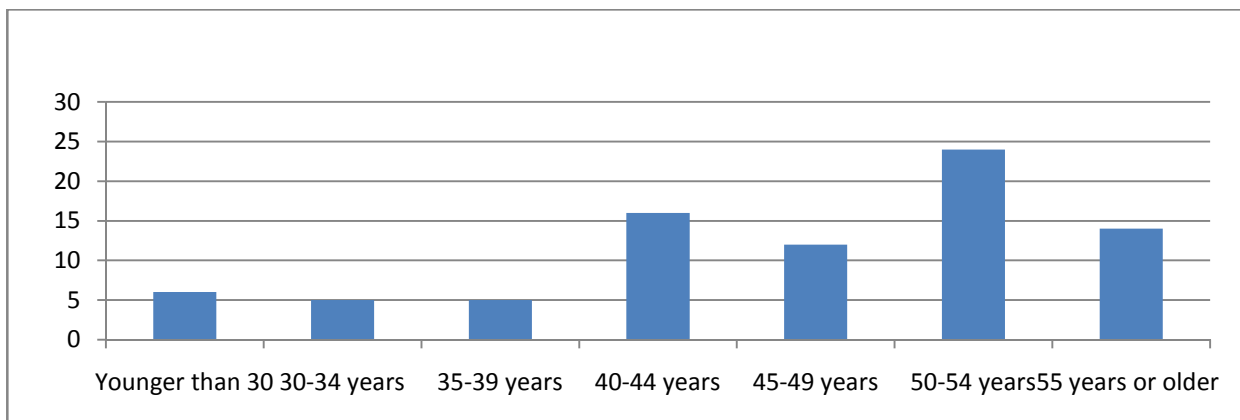
Concerning the composition of the sample, more men (61) participated in the survey than women (21). The distribution of men and women is about 3:1, which is close to the male/female ratio of PLD students that is estimated to be between 2:1 and 3:1. This distribution is also comparable to the distribution of gender in the former survey.

Table 4. Distribution of gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	61	74,1
Femal	21	25,6
Total	82	100

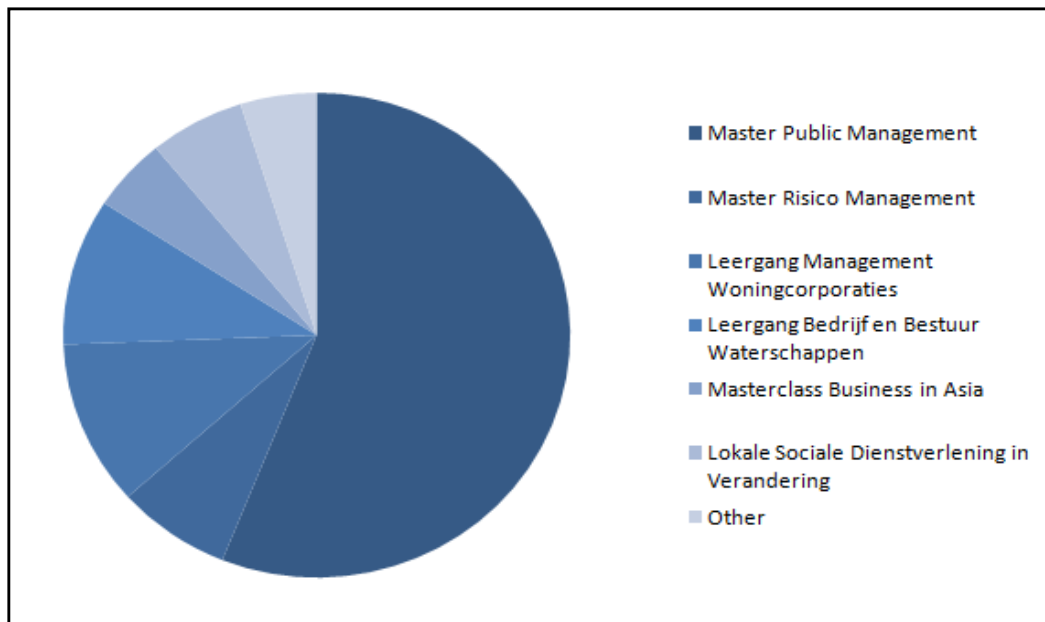
Looking at the age distribution of the respondents, the majority of participants are 40 years or older (80.5%). This might be due to the fact that PLD alumni were included in the sample group and that in general PLDs customers have between 3-5 years working experiences. Furthermore, it is conceivable that professionals want to have broad work experiences first before they start an advanced education, which might further explain the relatively old age distribution.

Figure 6. Distribution of age categories



With regard to the respondent profiles (see Figure 7), it is to state that many of the respondents follow the master Public Management (MPM) or are interested in it. This high number can be explained by the fact that MPM is the most popular and oldest education from PLD, and therefore has the most followers. For the other courses, the distribution is quite even. Here the 'Leergang Management Woningcorporaties' and the 'Leergang Bedrijf en Bestuur Waterschappen' are the most frequent. Concerning the distribution of educations, the population sample is representative for the target market of PLD, and it also resembles the characteristics of the survey conducted among PLD customers before.

Figure 7. Distribution of educations



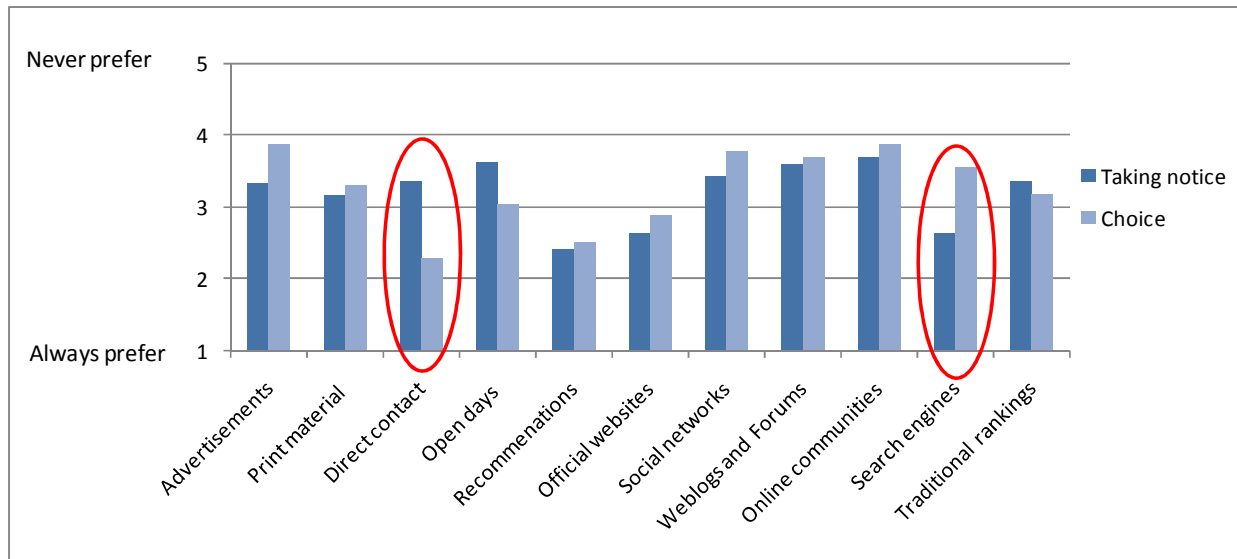
In general one can conclude that the characteristics of this survey are comparable to the sample from the former survey which is why both studies can be compared and this study can build on the former results.

In addition to the respondent characteristics, the participants were requested to indicate how they prefer to take notice of higher education institutions and how they prefer to make the final choice for an educational institution (see Appendix B1 and B2). This general information is important, as the main aim of PLD is to attract new customers. Therefore it is essential to know which channels customers use most to find a new educational provider and to incorporate these channels into their overall marketing strategy.

For taking notice of education institutions, customers indicated that they most often preferred recommendations from friends, family and acquaintances (79.7%), official school websites (85.2%), as well as traditional search engines such as google.com, yahoo.com or bing.com (77%).

Comparing these results to the answers as how participants prefer to make the choice for a provider of higher education (see Figure 8), it becomes obvious, that traditional search engines are less important for the choice of a provider than for taking notice of it. On the contrary, direct contact with the school is not very important in taking notice of a school (51.3%), but it is considered highly important in making a choice for a provider (82.4%). Next to direct contact, also recommendations from friends and family (79.7%) and the official school websites (75.7%) play an important role in the decision making for a school or university.

Figure 8. Comparison of how people prefer to take notice of higher education institutions and how they make the final choice for an institution (N=74)



3.3.2 Social media usage

Looking at the different places from where customers access the Internet, it becomes clear, that still most of PLDs customers regularly access the Internet from home or from work. The number of people, who access the Internet from university (18.7%) or public places (18.7%) more than once per week is still quite low (see Appendix B3).

Concerning the different media customers use to enter the Internet, the PC is still the most popular medium. However, a shift can be noted towards the increased use of laptops and mobile phones. It seems that among the PLD target group who responded, Tablet PCs are used less so far (see Table 5).

Table 5. Usage of the different media to access the Internet (N=76)

	Always			Never
	1	2	3	4
PC	40	18	9	9
Laptop	31	19	7	19
Tablet PC	21	14	8	33
Mobile phone	21	19	16	20

Furthermore customers were asked to indicate the frequency with which they carry out diverse passive and active activities in social media (see Appendix B5 and B6). Hereby it became obvious that most customers are more likely to carry out passive than active activities in social media. Regarding passive activities customers most frequent activities are the consultation of forums for information and reading product reviews in social media. Concerning the more active activities in social media, customers are most frequently sending messages to distribution lists.

When asked whether customers are active users of social media sites and especially of social networks, about 77 % of respondents agreed to be an active user of such sites (see Appendix B7). For the people who indicated to be an active user of social media sites, the main motivations (see Appendix B8) to use these sites are the ability to make new contacts (21.3%), to enlarge the personal network (21.3%) and to keep in touch with friends and acquaintances (20.3%). Further motivations named are the ability to keep informed about news and events (14.5%) as well as entertainment (12.6%).

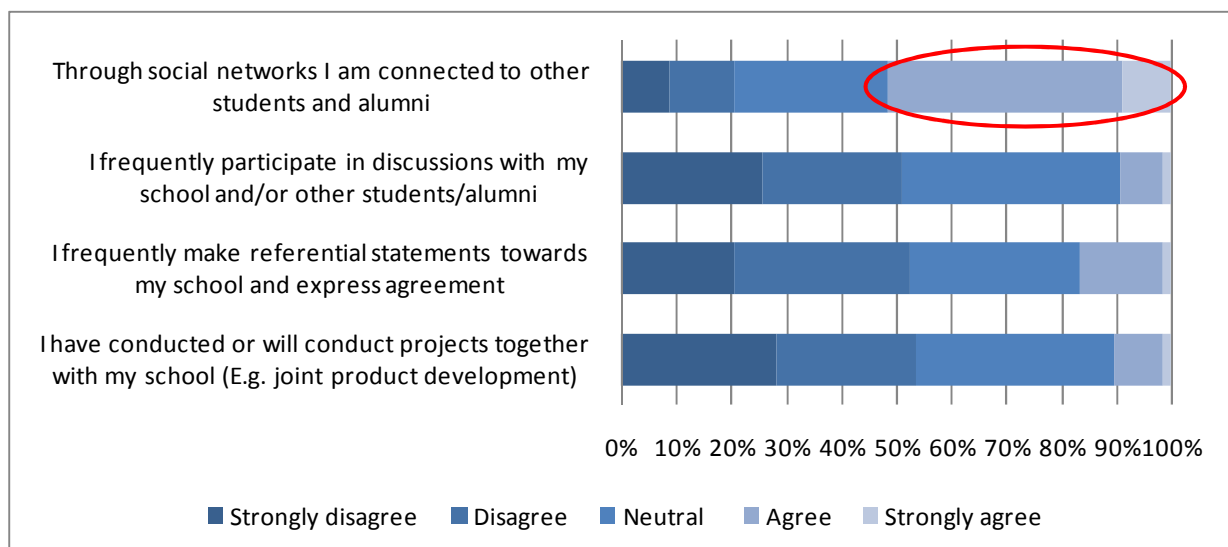
Due to the fact that PLD has recently started a banner campaign on LinkedIn, the participants were asked whether they remember seeing any of the advertisements from PLD and whether they usually click on such adverts (see Appendix B9 and B10). Out of the 82 respondents, however, only 12 people (14.6%) noticed the PLD advertisements on LinkedIn and from the 12 people who saw them, only one fourth actually clicked on them.

3.3.3 Customer value: Interaction, Knowledge and Relationship

Interaction

Concerning interaction most of PLDs alumni, current and prospect customers are not very involved with their school yet. The majority of respondents has not yet conducted joint projects with their school and does not frequently participate in discussions with them. However, about 51 % indicated that they are connected to students and alumni of their school through social networks (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Customer’s involvement and networking activities with the school (N=78)



As can be observed from Figure 10, when choosing a school, the uniqueness of the product or service offered and the variety of offers of a school/university influence the customer’s choice for a school. In contrast, the ability to participate in the design of products, and the ability to discuss with the school do not seem to have an important influence on the customer’s choice.

Figure 10. Influence of interaction indicators on the decision making in the choice of an educational institution (N=77)

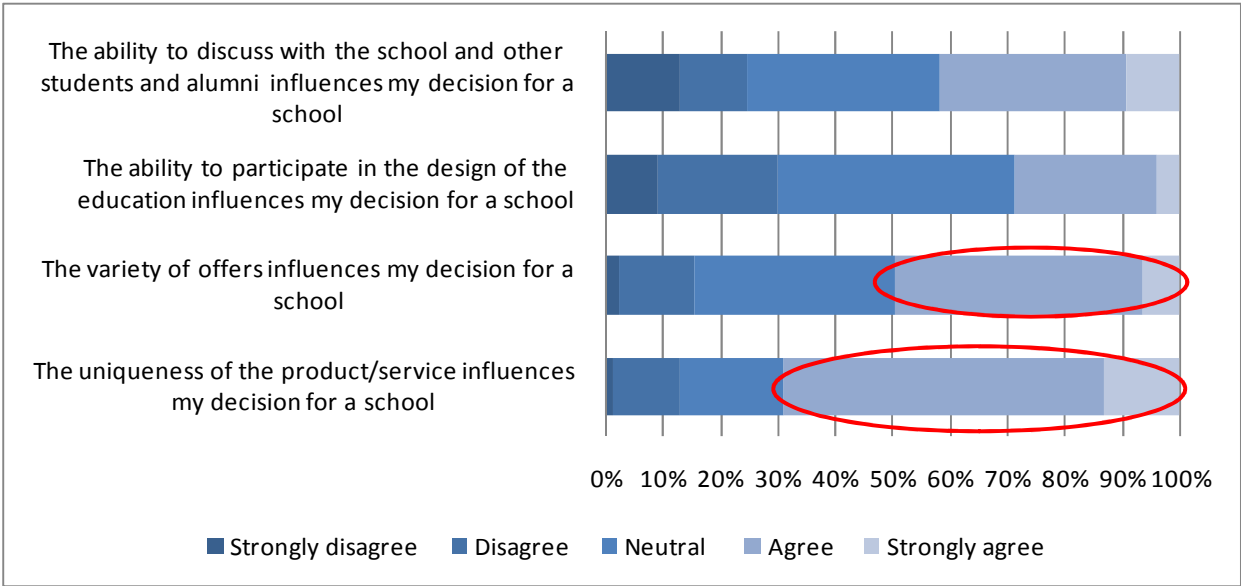
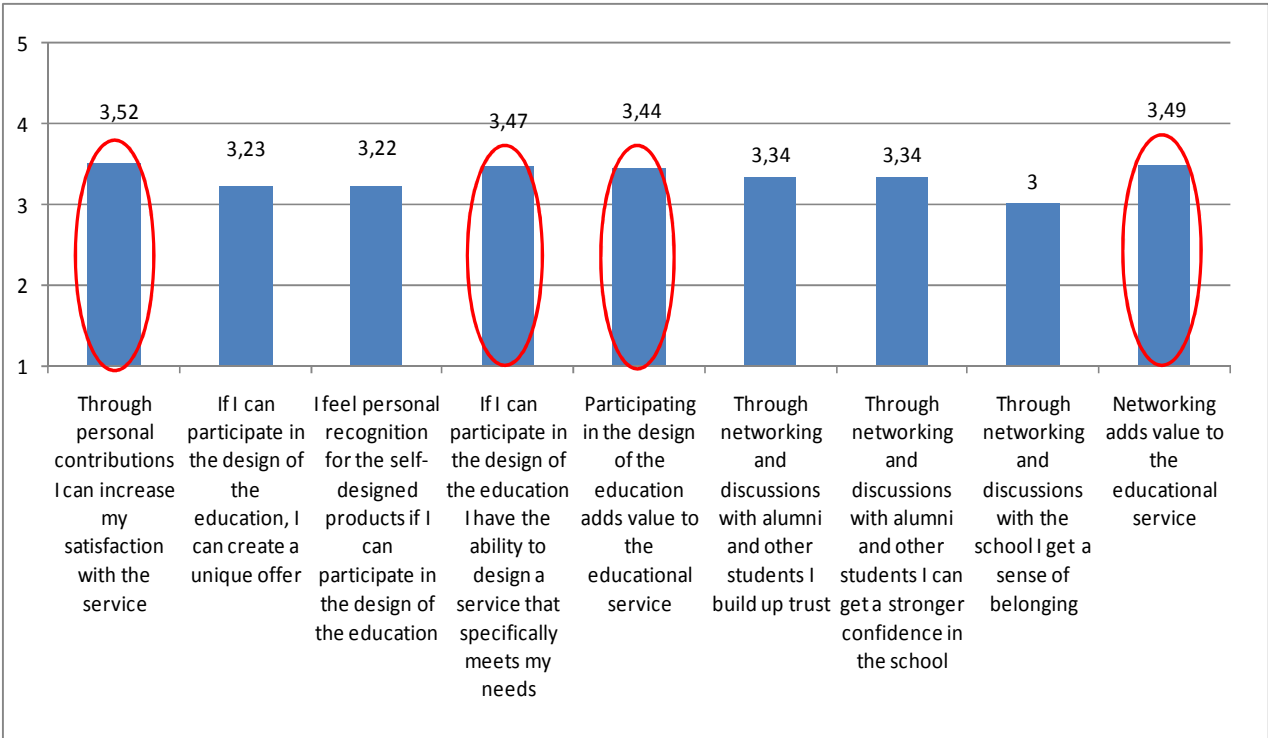


Figure 11 depicts which indicators of the social media quality relationship create the most value for customers. In general all indicators of interaction are rated relatively high with mean values between 3 and 3.52. However, customers agreed that through participating in the design of the service customers can design a product that specifically meets their needs (53.1%) and which therefore increases the satisfaction with the service (55.7%). Furthermore, they indicated that apart from a participation in the design of the service, also networking adds value to the educational service.

Figure 11. Mean values of customers perceived value of interaction indicators (N=79)

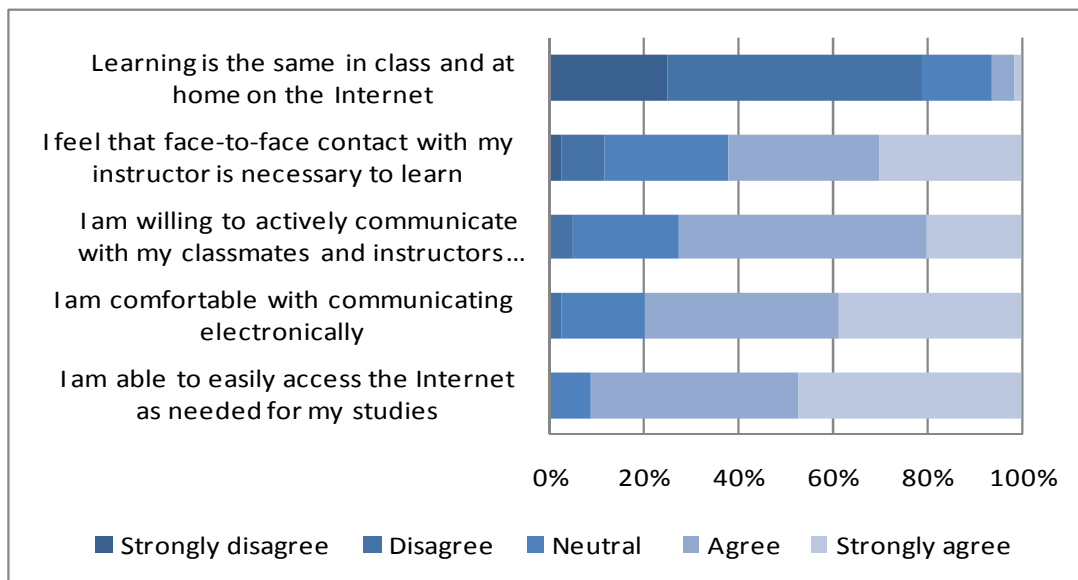


Knowledge

In order to learn more about customer’s expected value of knowledge, as provided through online learning and entertainment, people were first asked to indicate whether they have previous experiences with online learning (see Appendix B11 and B12). From the 82 respondents, 32 (39%) have had experiences with online learning yet. Almost all of them agreed that their experiences were positive (68.8%) or at least neutral (31.2%).

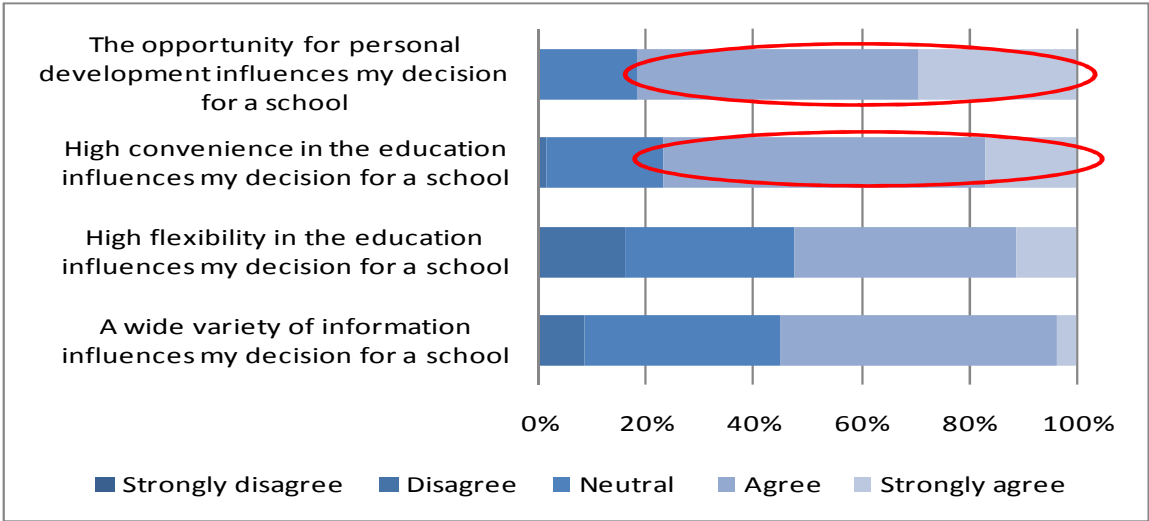
People’s preparedness for online learning is depicted in Figure 12. It demonstrates that the majority of PLDs customers, alumni and prospects have the prerequisites for online learning. They are experienced in using the Internet and communicating electronically. However, about 79% are not convinced that online learning is the same as learning in class. Furthermore, 62.5 % indicate that for them face to face contact with their instructor is necessary to learn, which might indicate a resistance to online learning.

Figure 12. People’s preparedness and willingness to use social media (N=80)



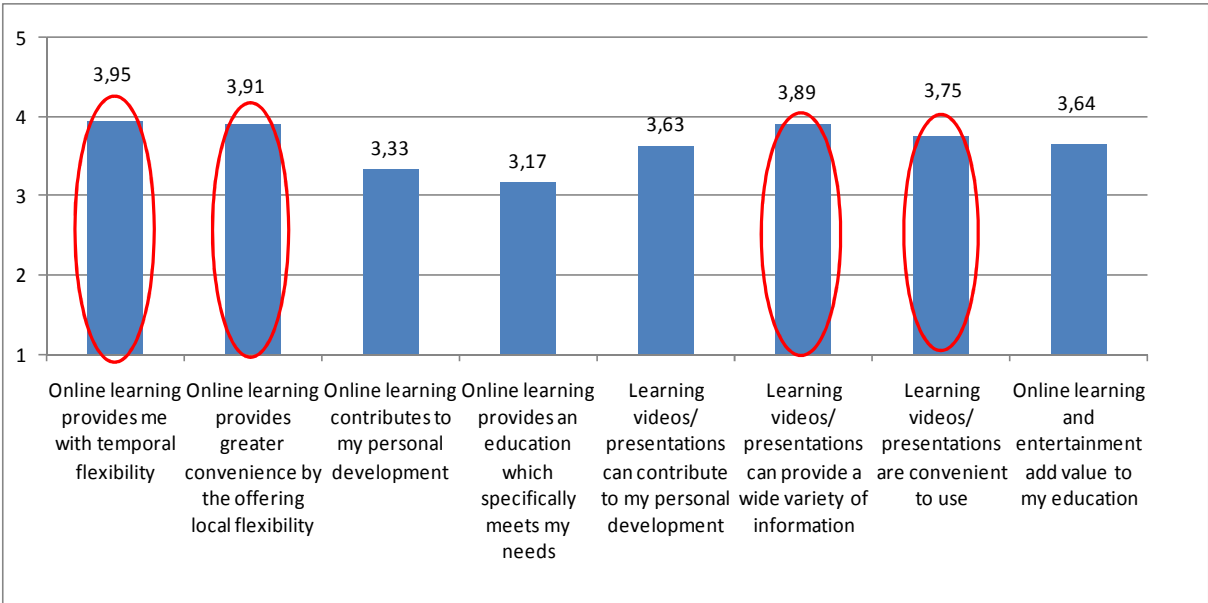
The choice of an educational institution is influenced mainly by the opportunities for personal development and the convenience of educations offered by the school. As can be seen in Figure 13, about 77% of the participants agreed that convenience in the education is highly important for them and for even more people (81.7%), the opportunity for personal development is one main priority in the choice for an educational service provider.

Figure 13. Influence of knowledge indicators on the decision making in the choice of an educational institution (N=82)



Concerning the expected values of the knowledge indicators, the interviewees agreed that online learning creates value by offering temporal (85.2%) and local flexibility (76.5%). In addition, about 70% confirmed that learning videos and presentations are convenient to use and can provide a wide variety of information for customers (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Mean value of customers perceived value of knowledge indicators (N=81)



Relationship

As depicted in Figure 15, customers agree that their choice for a higher education institution is influenced by a high conversation quality (72.8%) with the school, as well as by having regular contact (71.6%) with the educational institution. The social visibility of a school, meaning their visible presence on social media sites, however, does not seem to be highly relevant for the choice of a school. Hereby only a minority of 24.7% respondents confirmed that social presence influences their decision making.

Figure 15. Influence of relationship indicators on the decision making in the choice of an educational institution (N=81)

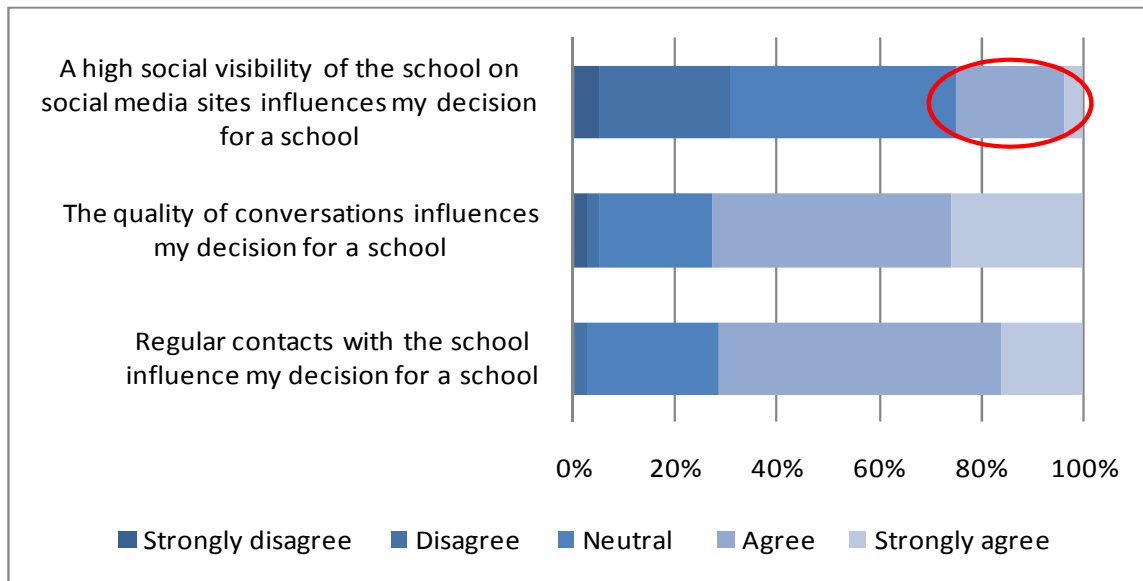
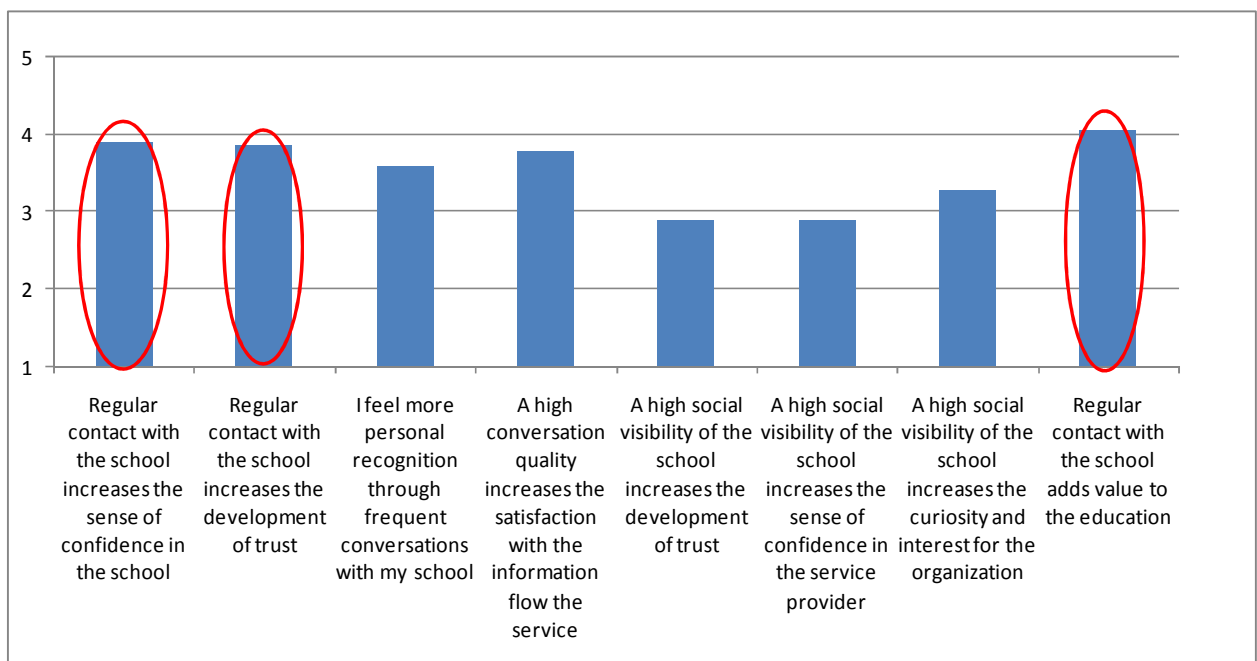


Figure 16 provides information regarding the expected customer value created by the different indicators of the social media quality relationship. Customers agreed that regular contact with a school increases the development of trust (77%) and the confidence in the educational institution (78%). With regards to the social visibility of a school, customers confirmed that the social visibility of school does not seem to have significant positive influence on customer’s expected value. Only 15% agreed that being socially present can contribute to an increased confidence in the service provider.

Figure 16. Mean values of customers perceived value of relationship indicators (N=82)



3.4 Discussion of results

Social media use

Looking at the results of the survey again, it becomes obvious, that most customers take notice of educational providers through recommendations, school websites and search engines, while for the final choice direct contact is more important. New media such as online communities or weblogs do not seem to play an important role in taking notice of and choosing a school yet. These findings should be kept in mind when setting up a new social media marketing strategy. In the survey, many customers indicated that a school's website is quite important for the choice of an educational institution (85.2%). This finding, however, stands in contrast to the findings of a previous survey conducted among PLDs target group. There the rate of people who indicated that they know PLDs website was only at about 37%, and the rate of people who actually visit the website on a regular basis was even lower. This mismatch is highly surprising and it would be nice to learn more about the reasons for the deviations in results. Anyway, as customers rated the importance of the website high, PLD should continue its efforts to improve and optimize its website for customers.

Another finding that is striking is the importance of search engines such as google.com or yahoo.com for taking notice of educational institutions. This highlights the growing importance that Search Engine Optimization (SEO) will have for future online marketing, a fact that PLD should pay close attention to in their strategy to attract new customers.

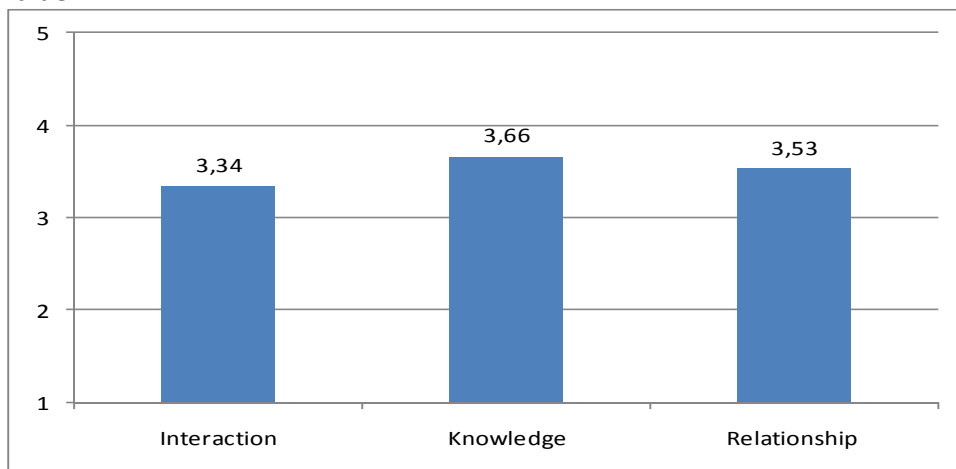
Concerning people's behaviour in social media, it is to note that a majority of customers more frequently take part in passive activities than actively doing and contributing things. This result is comparable to the results of the survey conducted before. There people's main active action was the participation in social networks, whereby the percentage of passive activities, especially reading product reviews and finding information was significantly higher. This lack of active activity represents a threat to social media marketing, as it will be hard to motivate customers to actively participate and make contributions in social media. Considering social networks, it becomes obvious that they are highly important and relevant for social media marketing, as a majority of customers is present there (77%). This confirms the results of a former study, where about 81% of respondents indicated that they are actively present on social networking sites.

The fact that the rate of respondents who have noticed PLDs advertisements on social media sites yet is very low and that the number of people who actually click on such advertisements is even lower is not satisfactory. For future research it might be interesting to have a closer observation on the reasons why people do not notice advertisements and why they do not click on them. However, one possible explanation for these low results might be that many of the respondents of the survey are customers or alumni of PLD already, who know the organization well and therefore, might not click on advertising banners. As indicated by literature, adverts are an easy way to attract a large number of potential customers, which suggests that this strategy might be more successful for people who do not know PLD yet.

Interaction, knowledge and relationship

The main purpose of this study was to determine in how far the three social media qualities interaction, knowledge and relationship influence the expected customer value. In the following, the analysis of data is reviewed critically to determine whether the hypothesis concerning the social media qualities and their influence on customer value are correct. In general one can conclude that all three qualities add value to the education for customers. However, there are significant differences between the different qualities as well as between the different tactics to create the qualities, which will be discussed in more detail in the following.

Figure 17. Mean values of agreement that the qualities (interaction, knowledge, relationship) create value.



With regard to the social media quality interaction, the mean value of agreement that interaction and its indicators create value is 3.34. Concerning the tactic of co-creation, about 53% of respondents agreed that it adds value to the education and for the tactic of networking, even 58% agreed. Hereby it is to notice that especially the participation and personal contributions as well as networking activities with the school and students and alumni can increase the satisfaction with the service and with that the expected customer value.

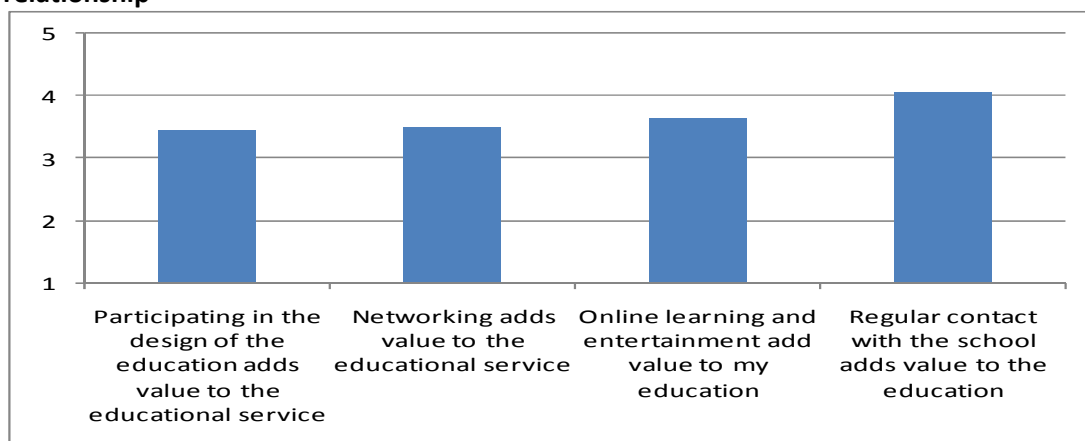
For the quality knowledge, the mean value of agreement that the indicators of knowledge create value for customers lies at 3.66. About 67% agreed that online learning and entertainment increases the expected customer value. They pointed out that online learning has the benefit of temporal and local flexibility. Entertainment elements, such as learning videos or presentations are especially convenient to use and can provide a wide variety of information. These advantages are especially appealing for professionals such as PLDs customers, due to the fact that they are often busy and therefore appreciate flexibility and convenience. However, as explained before, there might be some resistance to pure online learning, as customers feel that online learning is not the same as learning in class and that direct contact with the instructor is necessary to learn.

The mean value of agreement that the indicators of relationship create value for customers is 3.53. About 79% of the respondents indicated that in their opinion, dialogue and regular contact with the school or university can increase the value of the education in that they create trust and confidence in the organization. Even though it appears that social presence does not seem to influence customer value, it should still be considered as a tactic to arouse attention for the organization and attract completely new customers, as proposed by literature.

In order to test the hypotheses which have been established for the research, it has been decided that in order to declare the hypothesis to be significant, the statements have to reach a mean value of agreement that the qualities create value of above three. This value has been chosen, as three marks the point of neutrality. A mean value above three therefore indicates a positive relation, which gets stronger, the higher the value gets.

Due to the fact that all mean values of agreement for the three qualities show a positive tendency, as they lie above the neutral value of three, we can conclude that the hypotheses are true and that all three qualities create expected customer value. However, when the customers were directly asked about whether the different strategies add value to the educational service, differences between the strategies were visible. By looking at the different social media qualities and tactics more closely, it becomes obvious, that the relationship quality in the form of regular customer contact provides the most value, followed by knowledge through online learning and entertainment tactics.

Figure 18. Mean values of the different strategies to achieve the qualities interaction, knowledge and relationship



These results resemble the findings of an earlier question where customers were asked to indicate their main motivations for using social media sites. There, a trend towards networking, dialogue and entertainment was visible as well, in that people's motivations were the creation and maintenance of contacts as well as information and entertainment purposes.

Looking at the proposition, that the perceived customer value is positively related to reputation of the organization and with that also to its ability to attract new customers and to increase the number of students, the study reveals that there is a connection between the perceived customer value and reputation.

Customers were asked to indicate what influences their choice for a school and it turned out, that some of the indicators of the different qualities (interaction, knowledge, and relationship) do in fact exert influence in customers' choices. So does, for example regular contact with the school (an indicator of relationship) strongly influence customer's choice for an educational service provider.

Concluding one can say, that in order to create more customer value and thus to strengthen the customer relationship and attract new customers, higher education institutions, and PLD in specific should mainly focus on creating value through knowledge and relationship qualities which can best be realized through entertainment and dialogue tactics in form of regular customer contact, whereby it is to note that the content provided in the dialogue has to be of high quality.

3.5 Limitations and future research

Obviously the research which has been conducted in the course of this study is not free of limitations. One significant limitation is that the respondents of the survey have not been sampled randomly, but rather with a purposive sampling method. Due to the fact that only people from PLDs CRM system have been addressed in the survey, the external validity may be threatened, which means that it might not be possible to make accurate generalizations for professionals outside the boundaries of PLDs CRM system.

Another limitation might have been caused by the self administered questionnaires. When the researcher is not present and the respondent has to fill in the questionnaire without help, it is difficult to know whether the respondents have understood the questions properly. There might be misunderstandings or wrong interpretations. However, due to the fact that the questionnaire was tested beforehand, this limitation was minimized.

Moreover, the relatively low response rate might be considered a limitation of the study. The fact that the response rate only lay at 11.71% bears the threat that the sample becomes under representative for the target population. However, through carefully checking the sample characteristics and comparing them to the population characteristics, this threat could be limited.

For future research it would be interesting to investigate the real effects of social media on customer value. At this moment it is only possible to analyze people's expectations of how the different qualities will influence their value, and not to analyze the real effects. Such analysis might be possible when the social media strategy is in place and executed for some time, as then it will be possible to measure whether the new strategy actually contributed to customer value and lead generation for PLD.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to test whether the propositions that have been made in this research hold true. The lack of time did not allow the testing of propositions within the frame of this research. However, it might be good to see in how far the increased customer value actually exerts a positive influence on an organizations reputation and with that lead generation. Moreover, it would also be interesting to observe the relation between the different social media qualities more closely and to see whether the proposition that they are interrelated holds true.

Finally, it would be interesting to enlarge the sample outside the boundaries of the PLD network, to see whether the results also hold for professionals and prospective customers who do not know PLD yet.

Chapter 4

Social media strategy PLD

In this chapter, the results from the literature analysis and empirical analysis conducted before shall be used to develop a concrete social media strategy for PLD and to answer the question how PLD can make effective use of online marketing devices under special consideration of social media in order to attract potential customers (question VI). The framework model, as tested and verified in the previous chapter, will be implemented with the help of the process model described in the literature review. The process model will hereby serve as the basis for the structure and composition of the social media strategy. As a first step, goals will be defined and a context analysis will be conducted. Based on the framework model and the results of the empirical analysis, social media qualities and tactics will be chosen for a successful social media marketing strategy for PLD that creates prospect customer value.

In order to illustrate the strategy, one special education was chosen as an example for which the social media marketing strategy will be demonstrated. Due to the fact that the majority of respondents (56.1%) follow the master's degree course public management, it was decided to design a specific strategy for that course, which, however might be transferred to PLD's other educations with a few adaptations.

The master public management is a master program which is directed at and wants to address people in leading management positions in the public sector (e.g. government, public administrative organizations, and non-profit organizations dependent on the government) or people who aspire to take such a position for the future.

The master program first started in 1990 and therefore can draw on many years of experience and expertise. The program's regular study time spans two years and it has a modular structure. After a base year in which all aspects of public management are on the agenda, students can choose three master classes in the 'verdiepingsjaar' before they write their master thesis. The training provides participants with current theoretical knowledge and links it to the constant practice of the public sector. In general the number of participants for the MPM ranges between a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 25 students. Students' main motivations to take place in the course are the possibility for personal and professional development and also the opportunity to get better jobs. Furthermore the increasing demands on managers in the public sector for commercial work and social responsibility are motivations to follow the course MPM.

A summary of the strategy which will be presented in the following can be found in Appendix F in form of general guidelines for an exemplary Social media strategy for the MPM.

4.1 Business objectives

The overall goal of the department of Professional Learning and Development is to further grow, to stay financially and economically profitable, and to be ahead of competitors. This includes the attraction of new customers, but also the development of the educational offers and the strengthening of existing customer relationships.

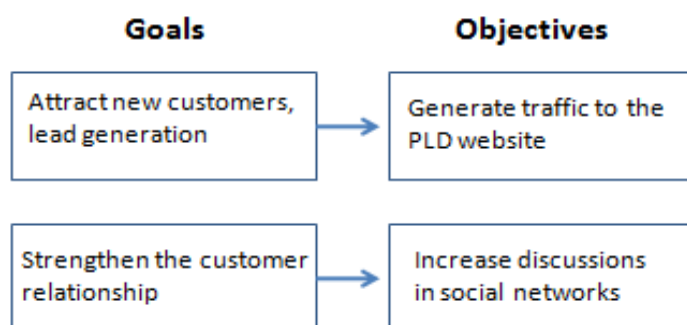
Therefore, the organization’s mission is to develop, manage and offer market-based postgraduate education in the Netherlands and in international markets. This in a financially economic way within the framework and signature of the university, where knowledge and insights of the UT / MB are available as starting points. The department’s mission includes the creation of synergies through sharing knowledge and insights with professionals, as well as the development of new visions and knowledge through contributions from organizations.

Concerning its image, PLD pursues diverse objectives. PLD wants to achieve and strengthen a signature of being known as an innovative and internationally oriented provider of education on a high academic level, which is inspiring and state of the art.

4.2 Online marketing goals

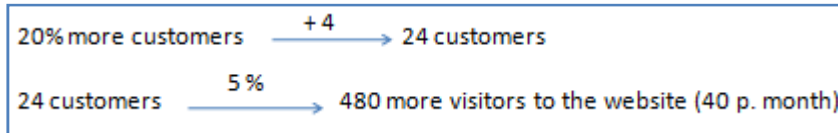
In order to reach PLD’s overall business objectives as explained above, the organization wants to make increased use of social media and online marketing. Therefore, specific online objectives and goals have been defined to help the organization to improve their online business activities and to support the realization of the overall goals.

With regard to social media and online marketing, PLD wants to make more effective use of social media. Hereby the aim of social media is twofold. On the one hand, social media shall be used to attract new customers and thus to grow the business. The aim of reaching new customers and generating new leads shall be reached with generating more traffic of valuable visitors to the PLD website. People shall become aware of and get attracted to PLD. The conversion rate of the website is about 5%. If more customers visit the site, this number might be further increased and new customers can be won. On the other hand, however, social media should also be used to stay in touch with existing customers and alumni to strengthen the customer-supplier relationship with them. In this respect, PLD would like to increase customers’ participation in discussions, especially in social networks. In order to reach both objectives and the goals behind them, PLD plans to offer additional value for its customers and prospect customers through social media marketing.



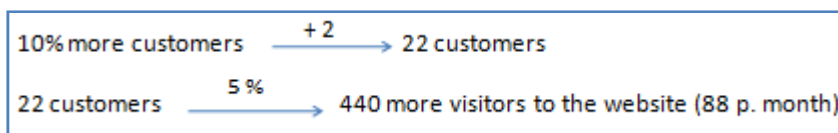
On average, about 20 students attend the MPM. In order to reach new customers, two scenarios are possible, one with long term and one with rather short term goals.

Long-term scenario (12 months)



In the long term, PLD might strive towards a 20% increase of customers which would mean that the average number of participants of the MPM programme would rise to 24. Keeping in mind that the conversion rate of people who visited the website, requested information material there and finally became customers is about 5%, in order to reach a 20% increase in customers, about 480 more people have to visit the PLD website. Assuming that PLD would wish to implement the strategy within one year, this would mean that per month, about 40 more customers should be directed to the website.

Short term scenario (5 months)



Another possible scenario would be the implementation of the strategy before the start of the new programme in September. This way, PLD will only have five months to attract more customers to join the programme. However, even if the targeted increase would be lowered to 10% more customers, this would mean that additional 88 visitors would have to go to the PLD website per month. This seems quite unrealistic, as many of the applications that will be used in the strategy still have to be installed, which will take some time. In general 88 additional visitors is a high number which would be really hard to achieve, which is why PLD should stick to the first scenario and check their results after one year.

4.3 Context analysis of current online marketing activities and preconditions

Following the process and framework model, a context analysis follows the definition of goals, as it influences the strategic choices for qualities and tactics at a later stage of the strategy development process. This analysis wants to provide an answer to research question IV and V by determining whether PLD fulfils the conditions necessary for the implementation of a successful social media marketing strategy.

The internal context analysis is based on the concept of the 'Marketing Strategy Pyramid' as proposed by Constantinides et al. (2008) and was conducted with the help of semi structured interviews with PLD staff. Further, data from a previous research among PLD prospects, students and alumni was consulted for the internal analysis.

As Constantinides, Romero and Gómez Boria (2008) point out, organizations first have to identify their strategic position and requirements for an application of social media as marketing tool in the context of the organizations' overall marketing strategy, whereby the Web 2.0 should be seen as the top of the marketing strategy (see Appendix C). As

Constantinides (n.d.) explains, in order to be effective, social media marketing has to be rooted and build up on a high quality product or service, a solid organizational support as well as a good application of web 1.0 activities mainly through a well designed website as those are preconditions for successful social media marketing. Therefore the first step in the internal context analysis will be a closer observation of the services offered by PLD followed by an analysis of the department's organization. After that the web 1.0 activities of PLD will be analyzed in more detail mainly by evaluating the organization's website.

4.3.1 Data collection

The primary data that has been used for the internal analysis has been collected with the help of semi-structured interviews among PLD staff. The interviews have been conducted among staff with different tasks within the department in order to receive different perspectives and opinions and realistic assessments. The interviewees were program managers of the different master and in-company courses, as well as a bureau manager and project assistant. In total four interviews have been held, all in English. Within their diverse tasks, two of the interviewees (the program managers) have a lot of customer contact, whereas the other two interviewees have rather few customer contacts. However, all of the respondents receive regular feedback from students, either through evaluation forms or through personal talks. Therefore it is anticipated that they can give a good assessment and estimation of their customer's feelings towards PLD and the educational services offered. During the interviews, notes were taken in order to be able to remember the most important findings.

For the interview questions answering possibilities are given to provide some general direction as to what answers are expected. However, through closer interviewing and follow-up questions, deeper insight should be gained about PLD's readiness for social media with regards to its service offerings, organization and web 1.0 applications. For the analysis, the answers of respondents have been compared and accordance has been recorded. For the free follow-up questions, an open coding approach, as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) has been applied. A template of the interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

4.3.2 Findings

Here the main findings from the semi-structured interviews as well as from the previous research among PLD prospects, students and alumni with regards to PLD's readiness for online marketing will be presented.

Product/ Service

As mentioned before, PLD offers a wide range of postgraduate education and training opportunities for professionals. As the interviews with PLD staff show, the feedback PLD receives is predominantly positive, which suggests that customers are rather satisfied with PLD service offers. In cases of negative feedback, PLD usually examines the critic points mentioned in customer evaluations and tries to improve on them if reasonable.

When asked for their opinion about what they think customers value most about PLDs offers, a frequent answer was the quality and the content of lectures provided by PLD, as well as the

variety and flexibility of courses. Furthermore the support for students was mentioned, as well as their opportunity to build up a valuable network with alumni and other students from important and well known public and private organizations. Another important point that was mentioned by one of the program managers is the fact that PLD enjoys a good reputation which is passed on through word-of-mouth recommendation, especially for its master program MPM, which is a well established program that already takes place for the 22nd time.

Concerning the differentiation points of PLD, staff suggested that an important point is the flexibility of courses, for example the opportunity to choose between specialization courses within the master programs, as well as the good image and reputation. Hereby PLD also profits from the good image of the University of Twente, as many students have a strong identification and positive connection with the UT. Another point that differentiates PLD from competitors is the uniqueness of some of its educational programs and their design, for example the program 'waterschappen' which in this form only exists once in the Netherlands.

Even though current offers seem to be quite satisfying, the PLD staff indicated that it is nevertheless necessary to continuously work on further improving the quality of lectures and programs.

Marketing Organization

PLD belongs to the School of Management and Governance at the UT. The department is relatively small and the organization is open and clear. However, as indicated by three of the interviewees, the number of services offered by PLD is rising, and the department has to adapt to the changes. The increasing number of courses also requires increased maintenance and organization, which is not yet in place at PLD. In order to handle these changes, the department structure, IT applications, tasks and responsibilities have to be adapted to the new situation. In this respect it was also mentioned that mainly all employees are working part time which can lead to coordination problems some times, especially when the number of offers and students continues to rise. Another point mentioned by one interviewee in this respect, is that the strategy should be made more explicit in order to provide a clearer direction.

As indicated by most of the interviewees, the majority of customers take notice of PLD and the offers through word-of mouth recommendations. Furthermore, also the brochures and advertisements of the department arouse interest. Two of the respondents further mentioned that they assume a growing importance of the Internet in the future. Once the people showed interest for PLD, for example through requesting information material, they are contacted in person by student assistants, so that the first customer contact usually takes place personally on the phone or through e-mail.

Concerning the online marketing activities, it became clear that most of the activities are conducted by the marketing responsible in the department. The interviewees indicated that they are not actively contributing to the marketing activities, but that they only provide information and the content to be used for marketing purposes.

At the moment, the department's website is administered by a central online media department which is responsible for the unified web appearance of the UT. However, the control over content and general wishes with regards to user friendliness and presentation still lies with PLD. PLD staff has to provide input for the website and has to make sure that the central administration has the latest data and news in order to keep the site up to date. However, the updating of information is sometimes lagging behind, as employees do not always provide news to the central administration directly, as this regular task seems to get forgotten. Here a regular reminder for PLD staff from a responsible person with a position central in the department might be useful, in order to guarantee that the website is always up to date.

Web 1.0/ website

For PLD, the website has a supportive communication function, as most of the communication with customers is direct. The website should address different customer groups, namely prospect students, current students as well as alumni. The strategic aim of the website is to inform the different target groups and to promote the departments' image.

Apart from Dutch programs, also international study programs are offered by PLD, and international students are targeted. Therefore the website should also be available in English. Due to the fact that the study programs are personalized, there are no transactions carried out via the website, thus there is no e-commerce and the main purpose of the website is informative in nature.

As the former survey among PLD customers showed, only 45 of the 121 interviewed customers and alumni knew the website of PLD (about 37%). Out of the ones that do know the website, however, many do not visit the website regularly and about 45% of them hardly ever visit the website at all. Apart from these issues, the website has an important function in the social media marketing strategy. The former study also identified which information the target population is looking for at the website and finds the most important. Here it became obvious, that the majority is looking for information about the various courses and subjects offered by PLD. Information about teachers or alumni, on the other hand are found far less important. These results also correspond with the answers given in the interviews with PLD staff.

Also the interviews among PLD staff confirmed that the employees are not really satisfied with the quality of the website and that they see a lot of room for improvements there. They criticize the lack of structure and convenience for the students and remark that the website is not really clear and user friendly.

Based on the former study and the resulting advices, a restructuring process of the website has been initiated. In a first step, the Dutch website has been partly adapted with regards to content and layout. However, there is still room for improvements.

Analysis of the main building blocks of web experience

As Constantinides (2004) defines, there are five main factors influencing the customers' web experience, namely usability, interactivity, trust, aesthetics and marketing mix. As he further explains in his work, the different elements should not be seen in isolation, but rather as interacting factors, whereby usability and trust are considered to be the most important ones. In the following, PLD's web experience is analyzed in more detail with the help of the different factors mentioned above to evaluate whether the Web 1.0 conditions for a successful strategy are given.

Usability

Before the restructuring, the website was quite unstructured and inconvenient for customers to use. The navigation was not clear, as one had to click through the whole site in order to find the information one was looking for. After the recent restructuring process, however, the navigation is clearer and the usability and convenience for customers increased. Concerning the findability and accessibility of the PLD website, the site is easily accessible for Dutch customers. They can enter it directly or find it through the navigation on the website of the University of Twente (www.utwente.nl). For English speaking international customers, however, the website is hard to find. They can access it by directly typing in the URL, but not via the UT site. The search facilities and site speed are alright and contribute to customer convenience.

Interactivity

On the PLD website, the interactivity between company personnel and customers and prospects is limited. Of course there is the opportunity to contact PLD staff via mail or directly on the phone, however there is no direct interaction possible on the website. There are no interactive elements which allow for an interaction in real time such as chat rooms. Also the website is missing forums or discussions groups where customers, alumni and prospect students can share their experiences. The site offers the opportunity to connect current students and alumni so that networking effects are created and the parties thus stay in contact. However, here the impulse for interaction has to come from the students as they have to contact staff first to ask for such an interaction.

Trust

Concerning the issue of trust, the PLD website is very convenient. Students, who are interested in taking a course at PLD, have several different opportunities. Apart from the possibility to fill in a direct enrolment form, students also have the chance to get a personal study advice from the program managers, as well as the opportunity to reserve a seat in the course (Optieformulier) for one month via a form during which their place in the course is reserved while students can arrange the financial details, discuss the issue with their employer, etc. In case customers decide for the direct enrolment, their personal data are used confidentially. Further elements to increase the customers trust in the organization are accreditations displayed on the website. Furthermore students have the opportunity to contact alumni and ask them for their experiences.

Aesthetics

The layout of the PLD website is in the corporate style of the University of Twente, so that the connection and shared identity of PLD to the UT is directly visible when customers enter the website. Before the restructuring process, the structure of the site was not clear and the visual elements were not significant and informative. Now, after the restructuring, the pictures and other visual elements have been replaced by meaningful images with a reference to the content. However, entertaining elements such as videos or podcasts are still missing on the website.

Marketing Mix

In general, PLD's website is well integrated into the departments overall marketing activities. There are references to the website on other communication and information materials such as brochures and flyers, but also in the correspondence in internal and external e-mails. Also the latest banner campaign at selected Dutch train stations included a reference to the PLD website. The website itself contains references to PLD's social media sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter.

Web 2.0/ social media

The department of Professional Learning and Development is already engaged in several social media activities. Currently the department has launched a banner campaign on LinkedIn and it also has several groups there. However, each study program has its own separate group which is not directly connected to PLD. Here PLD is currently trying to start a restructuring process of the groups to create a consistent appearance in the online community. Further, the department is currently planning to start using Twitter as a communication tool. A Twitter account has already been opened and there are plans to start twittering in the near future.

With regards to social media marketing, the interviewees showed diverse reactions and have diverse experiences with it. Two of the respondents indicated that they are quite experienced with social media, are in favour of it and support it. They are mainly active on Facebook and LinkedIn by sending regular messages and posting things. In contrast, the other two respondents are less active on social media sites. They are much more sceptical about the usefulness of it and fear that the hype about social media sites might not last. Concerning Twitter, most of the employees were quite sceptical. None of the respondents has experiences with Twitter yet and the medium is quite unknown to them. Another problem PLD faces is that the activities of staff in social networks are rather uncoordinated, so that one day there are several entries at once and other days there is no entry at all. Furthermore the entries vary strongly in their importance and significance for customers, which influences the potential for discussions. Here the aim should be to further coordinate the activities of different staff members and to try to make the statements as interesting and attractive as possible. Apart from that, another problem is the fact that in many cases customers are connected to the employees of PLD, rather than to the organization. In cases where people are only linked to PLD via the staff and not through groups, they are quite hard to reach, as they can only be addressed via the person they are connected to.

In order to get the employees' support in the new online marketing strategy, they have to be educated about social media. They should learn more about the different tools, how to use them correctly and why they are important. This is especially true for Twitter. Here clear explanations and guidelines can help to clarify what is expected of employees and what the goals of an engagement in social media are. In order to motivate employees to use social media, they should learn about the benefits that social media can offer for them. Once they know what is in for them, they will be more willing to actively contribute. If, for example, social media might facilitate the conversation with students for them or save them time, they might see this as an incentive and motivation to use social media more often.

4.3.3 Conclusion

In this subchapter, an internal context analysis of PLD was conducted with the help of semi structured interviews with PLD staff, to answer research questions IV and V. It was determined whether PLD has the conditions necessary for a successful social media strategy and what should be improved. The key findings of the internal analysis are presented based on Constantinides Pyramid:

- *Product/Service*: Concerning the satisfaction with PLDs services, one can conclude that customers are satisfied with the quality of services and that PLD enjoys a good reputation. Here the conditions for a successful social media strategy are met.
- *Marketing organization*: Concerning the organization there is still room for improvement for a successful social media marketing strategy. Especially with regards to the growing number of courses, PLD has to ensure to increase its capacities in order to guarantee a smooth operation.
- *Web 1.0*: Concerning the website, several improvements have been made through the restructuring process already. Also the integration with the marketing mix is done well. However, PLD should still work on the interaction factors on the website and especially on the usability for international customers to make sure that the website can support the social media marketing strategy more effectively.
- *Web 2.0*: Concerning Web 2.0 and social media, PLD is already active on LinkedIn and Twitter. However, some of the PLD staff is not very experienced with social media and has a sceptical attitude towards social media marketing. Furthermore, there is no common organization of social media activities and the activities and entries are uncoordinated. A better coordination might increase the qualities of entries and with that provoke discussions. Furthermore, staff should be educated more in the field of social media marketing to understand the sense of it and to use it more effectively.

All in all, it can be concluded that PLD fulfils the general conditions for a successful social media marketing strategy. However, improvements are still possible, especially concerning the marketing organization, the organization of web 2.0 activities and the website. Further improvements in these areas might allow for an even better and more effective social media marketing strategy.

4.4 Competitor analysis

Since the internal context analysis showed that PLD fulfils the conditions necessary for a successful social media marketing strategy, the next step is an external context analysis, which has a closer look at competitor's social media strategies.

For the master public management, based on a benchmark from 2006, PLD's main competitors can be considered the Business University Nijenrode, NSOB (Nederlandse School voor Openbaar Bestuur, the Hague), TIAS (Eindhoven), EUR (Erasmus University, Rotterdam) and AOG (Groningen). Due to the fact that the benchmark is from 2006 and might be outdated already, the results have been verified by looking at the different institutions and their offers and by a discussion with the PLD responsible who confirmed the main competitors. However, there still is a risk left as one cannot be 100% sure that the competitor analysis includes all relevant competitors.

Concerning social media, the organizations follow different strategies. Even though the majority of competitors seem to have recognized the importance of social media and embraced the media, there are still exceptions such as the NSOB which hardly engages in social media at all.

The other competitors all pursue a multi channel strategy, which means that they use different social media channels. Almost all of them display a reference towards the most important social media sites (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Hyves) on their main website. The posts in the diverse media are quite regular (between once a day and once per week) and mainly include information about upcoming events or the universities educations and products. However, same as with PLD, in general the diverse posts only reach few reactions from customers, especially no real discussions, but rather occasional likes.

4.5 Target group analysis

Following the competitor analysis, in this subchapter PLDs customers will be analyzed more closely in order to determine their needs, especially with regards to social media.

As already explained above, PLDs customers are professionals between 35 to 50 years on average who possess a HBO or WO diploma and are already active in professional life for about three to five years. PLDs customers who are interested in an extra education are motivated by the opportunity for personal development, as well as the possibility to use the newly acquired skills and capabilities to get a better job position or even better payment.

According to Lorenzo- Romero, Constantinides and Alarcón-del-Amo (2010), social media users can be classified into three different groups, based on their application of social media. Hereby, 'Embryonic' users are characterized by their weak usage of social media, mainly for file sending and creation. This group is often composed of females aged over 40. The second group, 'Amateur' users show a greater Internet usage than embryonic users. They participate in forums and post comments. The most active group is the group of 'Expert' users. They publish their own blogs, add content to wikis and they even customize products online.

Furthermore, the authors point out, that the degree of online experience, as specified above, is one of the most important determinants of trust and satisfaction with social media applications. Also they specify that the degree of experience customers have with the Internet is directly related to the number of visits to social media sites made.

As could be seen in these and former survey results, PLDs customers, alumni and prospects are mainly active in the social networks Twitter and LinkedIn. Concerning their activities, it became obvious that they are rather following passive activities than actively contributing in social media. Referring these findings to the assumptions drawn by Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides and Alarcón-del-Amo, PLDs customers can mainly be classified as amateur web 2.0 users. Regarding their acceptance and embracement of social media it can thus be concluded that PLDs customers will have a medium level of trust and show a medium level of extroversion on social media sites. These characteristics should be kept considered in the development of a social media strategy.

A further classification of social media users was made by John McKee, who addresses the issue of participation inequality in social media, in the form of the 90-9-1 rule (McKee, 2012). According to him, about 90% of the users can be classified as 'audience', who tend to read or observe, but do not contribute actively. Further 9% of users engage as 'editors' by irregularly modifying content or adding to existing contributions. Finally, only 1% of users do actually create and publish content. These 'creators' provide large amounts of the social media activity. Due to the fact that they account for a majority of PLD's customers, within PLD's social media strategy, the focus will be put on the 99% of 'audience' and 'editor' customers (see Appendix E).

4.6 Planning

The basis of the social media strategy for PLD builds the AIDA model, which in this case will be applied to a social media context. The AIDA model explains that customers go through different stages to reach a final buying decision: awareness, interest, desire, and action.

The first step is to create awareness for the organization. In this phase of the AIDA model, social media can play the biggest role. There are diverse methods for creating awareness for a product/organization online. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook or YouTube, are made exactly for this purpose. They facilitate the creation of contacts and communication and redirect users to the corporate websites of organizations. Hereby, conversations, interactions and contents are of great importance.

Once organizations have gained customers attention, the next step is to create interest in the products or services that are offered. In this step, for example social networks can be used to publish experience reports of existing customers. Another option would be the creation of a corporate blog.

Customers' interest and desire for a product are strongly influenced by a company's corporate website, which is why the website should be of high quality. Furthermore, recommendations from other social profiles can help to build desire.

Concerning the last step, action, social media is of minor importance only. As soon as the customers have the desire to buy, the website becomes the most important tool. It must be convenient to use for customers and should allow them easily complete their desired tasks.

Of course, PLDs strategy will span all parts of the AIDA model, with the focus however being set on creating awareness through offering additional customer value so as to attract new customers. In order to attract new customers and bind them to the company, PLD should focus on the *social media qualities of knowledge and relationship* in their strategy, which can best be reached by an entertainment and dialogue tactic. As the formerly conducted study in chapter three confirmed, these two social media qualities can help to create customer value and thus to attract and bind customers in higher education marketing.

Following the basic strategic approach which has been defined now, in the next subchapters, the social media tactics of entertainment and dialogue will be specified much more by determining the right contents and platforms to be used for the realization.

4.6.1 Contents

The core of the social media strategy, builds good and relevant content, which reflects the brand and provides users with a reason to stay engaged. Therefore a content strategy, which specifies what to say and when, is essential.

As a first step, one has to understand and define the audience's informational needs. Which topics should be addressed and which messages should be communicated. Relevant content might be news or information how to do certain things in an industry. Looking at the results of this and the formerly conducted survey, one can see that PLDs customers are interested most in contributions about political topics, opinions or topics related to their work field. Furthermore they like to receive news and information about PLD, such as upcoming events or contents of the educations. For the master public management interesting topics might be information about the public sector such as new regulations or developments, which might be put in context with PLD courses and contents of courses, reported and discussed by PLD.

It is also useful to browse the search engines for keywords which are used and searched often in the topics of interest. These keywords might be used in texts and contributions on the corporate website to improve the appearance of the website in customer searches. To determine how often the chosen words and phrases appear in searches, different tools can be used such as google AdWords. This provides an insight into which words should be used in the content strategy.

Possible keywords for the MPM customers might be:

- Management of public organizations
- Management overhead
- Publieke organisaties
- Politieke besluitvorming

All in all, it is of great importance to provide content of a high quality and to develop a unique style to ensure that the customers will be attracted by the information provided and thus directed to the website.

When addressing business people, finding the right tone is essential to create a dialogue. Therefore, the tone in PLDs communication should be businesslike. It should convey a competent image of the organizations. Moreover, the tone should be open and inviting so as to encourage dialogue and conversations.

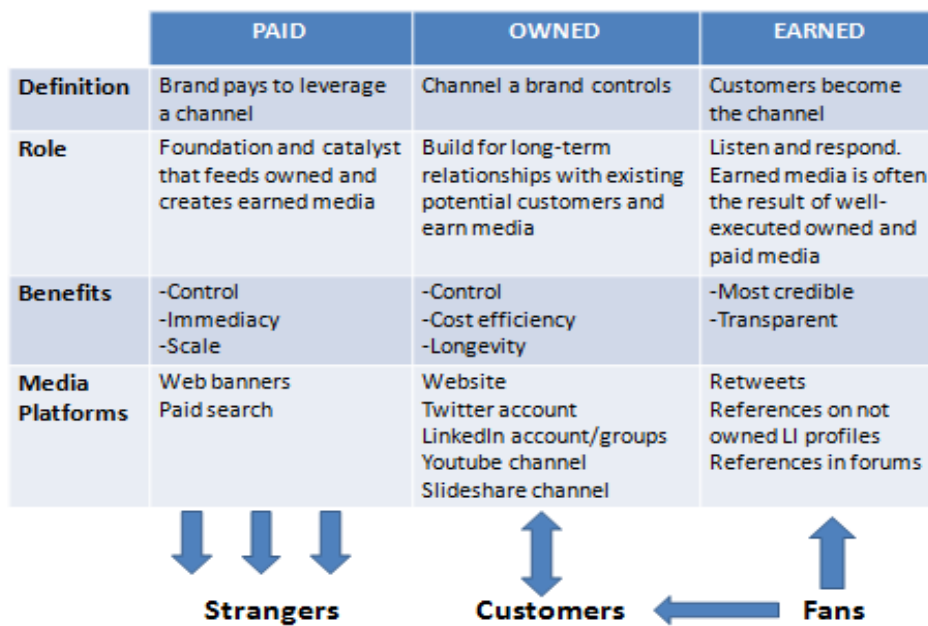
4.6.2 Platforms

Once the content strategy is defined, the right media have to be chosen to reach potential customers for PLD. Hereby, it can be distinguished between three main forms of social media platforms: Paid, owned and earned media. Paid media means any form of payment made to receive promotion for the organization such as print advertising in traditional ways, as well as banner advertising or pay per click. Owned media on the other hand comprises media types that the organization has control over. Hereby one can distinguish between fully-owned media such as the corporate website and partially-owned media such as Facebook or Twitter accounts. The third group is earned media, one of the most influential media types. It is mostly made up of word of mouth and favourable reputation for example in blogs external of the company, customer retweets or comments about the organization in customer social networks (Corcoran, 2009).

As stated before, at this moment PLD is mainly active in LinkedIn through diverse groups. Currently the MPM group has about 192 followers. Furthermore, first efforts have been made to start twittering. However, so far, PLD only has about 35 followers and the organization itself follows about 240 people. Looking at the classification of social media made before, PLDs efforts in those two media can be classified as owned channels. Concerning paid media, PLD has started first efforts as well by making use of listings, however, there is room for further activities and improvements. With regards to earned media, customers are not very active yet, which means that PLD should try to encourage more activity there.

With owned media, mainly existing customers can be reached, whereas with paid and earned media, new customers can easily be approached. This is why PLD should place greater focus on paid and earned media in their new social media strategy. A good mix of all three types of media will create a successful social media strategy.

Figure 19. Planned social media platforms for PLD



Source: Based on Corcoran (2009).

Concrete this means that in order to attract new customers, PLD should continue its web banner advertisements. In addition, the organization should also consider paid search as an interesting alternative, as customers indicated that search engines play an important role in taking notice of a school. Moreover, PLD should continue its efforts in the owned media in order to build and maintain long term relationships with alumni, existing and potential customers. Hereby PLD should concentrate on its existing channels in LinkedIn and Twitter as well as on its website. Furthermore, however, YouTube and slideshare present interesting opportunities for PLD. Both paid and owned media can finally act as support to increase the share that earned media has in PLDs social media strategy.

4.7 Implementation

4.7.1 Actions

As mentioned before, the new strategy will mainly be based on entertainment and dialogue tactics so as to create value for customers in order to attract new customers and to strengthen the existing relationships. It will mainly be executed in the owned media, with the aim to provoke reactions in earned media, which will use the customer's networks then to attract new prospects. In the following, possible measures for the different owned media will be presented in more detail, with the benefits they can bring for the two social media tactics.

Entertainment tactic

- **Website:** The PLD website builds the foundation of the strategy, as the aim is to attract more traffic to the PLD site. This is why the website should be designed in a way that it is interesting for the customers. Contents should be useful for customers and updated

regularly. As mentioned earlier, the contents should contain certain keywords which will improve the search results for the website. Apart from the current topics and news, the website might also contain entertaining elements such as presentations from symposia or image videos (E.g. experience reports from alumni, students, or statements from professors)

- **YouTube:** In context of an entertainment tactic, also the creation of a YouTube channel can be considered. Here, different videos can be displayed and a link to the PLD website can be established so that the videos appear there as well. In this way customers are directed to the PLD website. Through a good choice of keywords for the video titles, many people might also find the PLD videos through a general keyword search on YouTube or via google and might get interested.
- **Slideshare:** Same as a YouTube channel, also a slideshare channel can help to attract new potential customers and to create awareness for PLD. Here, PLD might for example place presentations or summaries from symposia or even some materials from the PLD courses on interesting up to date topics, with a reference to the PLD website.

Dialogue tactic

- **LinkedIn and Twitter:** In order to foster dialogue with consumers, the existing LinkedIn and Twitter channels (groups, accounts) should be used. As it is already being done, the latest internal news and PLD events should be announced. There should be frequent references to the website, for example when new content is published there (check out ... on our website) Moreover, interesting industry news, such as for example new regulations, might be displayed on the PLD pages. Hereby customers should be encouraged to participate in discussions, re-tweet and share their opinion about topics in order to gain earned media (What do you think about the current developments in ...?).

In addition, to the main media named above, blogs present an interesting alternative for PLD. At blog pages such as www.post-hbo-opleidingen.com or persberichten.nu, one can place articles, for example about new educational programs and their advantages or experience reports. Educational organizations themselves can write and publish articles here. However, the reliability and credibility of the articles might be increased if current students might be encouraged to write an article about PLD there. In general these efforts in public blogs might further help to improve search results, especially if frequent keywords are used for the texts.

Moreover, continuous efforts should be made in the paid media to guarantee better search results for PLD and thus to attract new customers. In this respect, paid search and SEO activities have to be agreed with the current marketing budgets to determine the intensity and range of action.

4.7.2 Internal communication

In order to guarantee a successful implementation of the new social media strategy, all PLD employees have to participate in the strategy. However, as it became obvious in the internal analysis, employees have different experience levels with social media and there is still some resistance to the new media forms.

Therefore, employees have to be informed about the new strategy and plans thoroughly. The different social media tools, their effects and the right treatment of the media have to be explained to the employees. Especially with regards to Twitter, but also concerning slideshare and YouTube, there will be a need for further clarifications. Employees have to understand the benefits that a new social media strategy might have for the department and for themselves, they need to know the concrete goals. Then they can be motivated by comparing the set goals to the actual results after a period of time. Also in the course of the strategy realization and execution employees and especially the representatives of PLD on social media sites should receive trainings to stay focused and up to date about current developments, as technology moves faster and faster.

4.7.3 Organization

One major step in the implementation is the organization, which deals with planning the resources and staff needed to implement the social media strategy. In order to guarantee a smooth and successful implementation, the responsibilities and the timing of strategic actions need to be clarified and defined.

Within PLD one person should be appointed to be responsible for supervising PLDs social media marketing activities and the website regularly. While all employees should be encouraged to contribute in social media, the maintenance and updating should be managed by one person so as to be able to keep an overview of the different activities in the diverse media.

In social media, regular contact and contributions are important so as to keep the medium interesting for customers and to create value. It should be ensured that each social media account establishes a rhythm that meets the needs of its audience. These rhythms strongly vary between the diverse media. While for channels such as YouTube or slideshare it is enough to update them every 3 months, when there eventually is new content in the form of videos or presentations, PLDs Twitter and LinkedIn profiles need more regular updates, at least every second day and also the content on the website should broadly be checked every week to displace outdated data and add new information. In addition to the appointment of a social media responsive, it might also be wise to create a staff plan which generally organizes which employee should twitter or post in LinkedIn at which day, to make sure that there are posts regularly and to avoid an imbalance that one day there are five or more posts while on other days there are none at all. In this respect also influencers should be identified and encouraged to post their opinions more often. These might for example be professors and lecturers from the courses or even important personalities from the public industry, whose ideas and thoughts are interesting for PLDs customers.

4.8 Control

After a successful implementation of the new social media strategy, an assessment and control of result and success of the social media measures is essential, as it provides further information as to where further improvements might be needed and it gives motivation to employees.

In order to evaluate the success of organizational activities, companies often rely on the Return on Investment ratio (ROI), which evaluates the gains or losses of an investment relative to the amount of money invested. The calculation of ROI in social media, however, is difficult and quite complex, as social media activities and application fields are quite diverse. The ROI of social media activities orients itself on the predefined goals that shall be reached with social media marketing (Bender, 2012). For PLDs social media activities, there are several performance indicators, which might help to determine the ROI of PLDs social media marketing activities with regards to the realization of the social media goals:

PLDs main aims with the social media marketing strategy were to generate more leads and to strengthen the existing customer relationships through generating traffic to the website and fostering dialogue with customers through creating additional customer value. Concerning the dialogue tactic, important metrics are for example the numbers of followers on twitter and group members in LinkedIn. Moreover, interesting key performance indicators (KPIs) are the audience engagement $((\text{Comments} + \text{Shares} + \text{Trackbacks}) / \text{Total Views})$, the conversation reach $(\text{Total People Participating} / \text{Total Audience Exposure})$ as well as the share of voice $(\text{Brand Mentions} / (\text{Total Mentions} (\text{Brand} + \text{Competitor A, B, C...n})))$.

Regarding the objective of generating traffic to the PLD website through social media the number of visitors to the website is decisive. It has to be determined how many of the people who visited the website were actually attracted and led to the website by social media sites. In this respect, it is also interesting to see which media were most successful in the realization of targets. With the help of the google analytics tool, which is already used by PLD, it is possible to determine from which platforms people were directed to the website.

Finally, of course it is to determine whether the defined targets of 20% more customers in the MPM could be realized within the targeted time frame of one year and which share social media had in the realization of targets. Hereby the effectiveness of social media in the attraction of new customers has to be compared to other marketing tools.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter tried to answer the question how PLD can make effective use of online marketing devices under special consideration of social media in order to attract potential customers. In chapter four, the framework model as tested and verified in chapter three has been implemented with the help of the process model presented in the literature review.

As a first step, goals have been defined and a context analysis of the organization has been conducted, which revealed that PLD fulfils the general conditions for a successful social media marketing strategy. However, in order to allow for an even more effective social media marketing strategy, several possibilities for improvements have been pointed out which PLD can consider prior to the strategy implementation.

Based on the results of the empirical study conducted in chapter three, knowledge and relationship have been chosen as suitable social media marketing qualities which should be reached by an entertainment and dialogue tactic to create additional customer value. Subsequently, guidelines for the implementation of the tactics have been developed and control mechanisms have been defined.

With a few adaptations (E.g. regarding contents and responsibilities) the strategy which has been developed for the MPM program can be applied to the other PLD courses as well.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Recommendations and Discussion

This chapter contains conclusions on how prospect customer value can be created in higher education social media marketing and practical recommendations for Professional Learning how to improve their social media activities in order to create additional value and thus attract prospect customers. Finally, this thesis and the results will be discussed critically. Thus the objective of this final chapter is to provide an answer to the general research problem and the main research question and to elaborate on it.

5.1 Conclusions: Customer value in higher education social media marketing

This master thesis dealt with the general research question how prospect customer value can be created in higher education social media marketing. In order to provide an answer to that question, a literature research in chapter two outlined in how far social media can be used in higher education marketing and it demonstrated that the role of social media or web 2.0 in the higher education sector should not be underestimated. It became obvious that social media is a suitable tool for value creation in higher education marketing.

Moreover, the literature review presented a process model for the planning of online marketing strategies and different social media qualities were identified in a framework model which were supposed to have a positive influence on customer value, namely interaction, knowledge and relationship. Furthermore co-creation, networking, online learning, entertainment, showing social presence and dialogue were presented as different tactics for realizing the social media qualities. All in all, the framework model specified that the central elements of a successful social media marketing strategy for creating customer value in higher education are the social media qualities (interaction, knowledge and relationship) and tactics (networking, co-creation, entertainment, online learning, showing social presence and dialogue), which will be influenced by the goals and context of organizations.

In the following, an empirical study was conducted among PLDs customers, prospect customers and alumni to gain a deeper understanding of their social media usage and to clarify which of the above mentioned social media qualities has the greatest influence on customer value. The empirical study was supposed to test the framework model developed in chapter two for its appropriateness and to determine whether the framework model fits for creating a social media marketing strategy which creates customer value in higher education. The research confirmed the appropriateness of the framework model. It verified that the model presents the main elements (qualities and tactics) of a successful social media marketing strategy for creating customer value in higher education institutions. The study attested that all of the presented social media qualities increase the expected customer value. However, it turned out, that even though all of the qualities and their strategies have a positive influence on customer value, knowledge and relationship are the most powerful influencers of expected customer value and that entertainment and dialogue tactics are most effective for realizing those social media qualities.

Coming back to the general problem and question how prospect customer value can be created in higher education social media marketing, one can conclude that prospect customer value can be reached by the three social media qualities interaction, knowledge and relationship, whereby knowledge and relationship appear to have the most positive influence on customer value. Further, one can say that networking, co-creation, online learning, being socially present and especially *dialogue* and *entertainment* present effective tactics for realizing the social media qualities. Moreover, in creating a social media marketing strategy for creating customer value in higher education, one has to consider that the goals and context of organizations serve as important influencers in strategy development and the choice of social media qualities and tactics.

5.2 Recommendations: Social media marketing strategy PLD

Since the basic question of how customer value can be created in social media higher education marketing has been answered, in a second step, the main research question of this thesis shall be answered, namely *how PLD can develop a social media strategy in order to strengthen the prospect customer value.*

Therefore the results from the external customer survey were used to develop a social media strategy for the department of Professional Learning and Development which is in line with the findings of the survey and which builds on the process and framework models as presented in the literature review. In the following, practical recommendations will be given to PLD. The organization can choose between different alternatives which help PLD to create a social media marketing strategy that creates value for customers in order to reach the aim of attracting prospect customers and generating leads. Therefore, necessary preconditions for a successful social media marketing strategy are defined first, as they serve as the basis for the strategy. In a next step, strategic recommendations are given, before practical advice is presented for the implementation of the strategic choices.

5.2.1 Conditions for a successful social media marketing strategy

According to Constantinides (n.d.), in order to be effective, social media marketing has to be rooted and build up on a high quality product or service, a solid organizational support as well as a good application of web 1.0 activities mainly through a well designed website as those are preconditions for a successful social media marketing strategy.

As part of the strategy development process, in an internal context analysis, it was determined that in general PLD is well prepared for a new strategy. However, there are several issues that should be considered and continuously worked on as preconditions for a successful social media marketing strategy. Prior to the implementation of the social media marketing strategy, PLD should consider the following actions:

1. Adapt the marketing organization to the growth of the department

As the number of services offered by PLD is rising, increasing maintenance and organization is required, which is not in place yet. In order to handle the increasing growth of the department the structure, IT applications, tasks and responsibilities have to be adapted to the new situation.

Furthermore, the strategic directions should be made more explicit in order to provide a clearer direction for employees. An improvement of the marketing organization with regards to the points mentioned above can ensure a smooth and solid operation which is needed as the basis of a successful social media marketing strategy.

2. Optimize the corporate website

Even though PLD has already made several improvements with regards to its corporate website through the restructuring process, there is still room for improvements. A well designed website can support the social media marketing strategy more effectively. As customers shall be directed to the PLD website it is essential to have a well functioning, convenient and informative website that is attractive for customers. Therefore PLD should focus on interaction factors and interactive elements on the website such as discussion groups to foster dialogue with its customers. Moreover, the usability of the site can be further improved, to make the use of the website even more convenient for customers. Especially for international customers, it is further of great importance to improve the findability of the site, to direct more international customers to the PLD site. Moreover, it might also be a consideration to include more entertaining elements such as videos or podcasts on the site to make it more interesting and attractive for visitors.

3. Optimize the Web 2.0 applications

Also concerning web 2.0 and social media, PLD has a lot of options for improvement as preconditions for creating a more effective social media marketing strategy. With regards to the social network LinkedIn, a restructuring might be necessary in order to make the PLD network clearer and to display it in a better way. Moreover, the social media activities of the department members should be better coordinated so as to increase the qualities of entries and with that provoke discussions. Finally, staff should be educated more in the field of social media marketing to understand the sense of it and to make better use of it.

5.2.2 Strategic recommendations

Next to the preconditions for a successful social media marketing strategy, this thesis provided strategic recommendations for PLD concerning the strategic choices within the creation of the social media marketing strategy. In order to design a social media marketing strategy for creating prospect customer value, PLD should consider the following recommendations:

- Use a relationship marketing approach
- Focus on creating customer value to attract prospect customers and generate leads
- Focus on the two most influential social media qualities knowledge and relationship to create customer value
- Use a dialogue and entertainment tactic to realize the qualities
- Focus on SEO and paid search tactics in the future, as search engines seem to be very important in the search for a new educational provider

5.2.3 Recommendations for strategy implementation

Once the strategic choices for social media qualities and tactics have been made, the actual implementation and planning process can begin. With the social media marketing strategy, the department tries to attract more prospects by generating traffic of valuable visitors to the website and to fostering dialogue with customers. Concerning the implementation of the strategy, PLD should consider the following actions and steps:

1. Choose the right contents and tone

As good and relevant content build the core of a social media strategy, PLD has to establish a content strategy. In order to address PLDs professional customers, interesting contents are political topics, opinions or topics related to their work field, news and information about Professional Learning. A keyword search and analysis might be helpful to determine which words are used and searched often in the topics of interest and to incorporate these keywords in texts and contributions on the corporate website to improve the appearance of the website in customer searches. Moreover the tone of the communication should be businesslike, but open and inviting to approach their business customers.

2. Choose the right platforms

Once the content strategy is defined, in a next step the right media should be chosen to reach potential customers for PLD. Hereby it can be distinguished between paid, owned and earned media. For PLD it is recommended to focus on paid and owned media to reach earned media. PLD should continue its web banner advertisements and consider paid search (paid media) in order to attract new customers. Moreover, PLD should continue its efforts in its existing owned media channels LinkedIn and Twitter as well as on its website. Furthermore, YouTube and slideshare present interesting owned media opportunities for PLD. It is expected that both paid and owned media can act as support to increase the share that earned media has in PLDs social media strategy.

3. Promote internal communication

In order to guarantee a successful implementation of the social media marketing strategy, all PLD employees have to participate, which is why a thorough internal communication is essential. Employees should be informed about the new strategy and educated about the different social media tools, their effects and the right treatment of the media. Moreover, employees should receive trainings to stay up to date about current developments in technology.

4. Clarify organization and responsibilities

For a smooth and successful implementation of the social media strategy, the responsibilities and the timing of strategic actions need to be clearly defined within PLD. It is recommended to appoint one person as responsible for supervising PLDs social media marketing activities and the website regularly.

A staff plan might be created which generally organizes which employee should twitter or post in LinkedIn at which day in order to guarantee regular posts and to avoid an imbalance. Moreover, influencers such as professors or important personalities from the public industry should be identified and encouraged to post their opinions.

5. Introduce control elements

Finally, PLD should consider the implementation of control mechanisms which provide information as to where further improvements might be needed and give motivation to employees. There are several interesting metrics and key performance indicators that PLD should consider such as the numbers of followers on twitter, the audience engagement or the share of voice. Overall, of course it would be most important to determine whether the defined targets could be reached and which share social media had in the realization of targets, whereby the effectiveness of social media in the attraction of new customers could be compared to other marketing tools.

All in all, it is expected that the recommendations provided to PLD can increase the customer value. The recommendations in form of pre-implementation requirements help PLD to establish a solid basis for their strategy which guarantees a successful implementation. The recommendations given concerning the implementation facilitate and enable the use of the social media tactics which again help to realize the social media qualities which finally add value for customers.

5.3 Discussion and critical reflection

This research was conducted with the intention and responsibility of providing Professional Learning with useful advice as how to make effective use of social media in their online marketing strategy. I am convinced that the thesis provided a good insight into how social media can be used as an effective marketing tool in higher education institutions for creating customer value and I am confident that the findings contain helpful information and advice for PLD, which is why I am satisfied with this thesis.

Looking at the framework model as developed and tested in this thesis, I am convinced that the model is suitable for answering the general research problem how customer value can be created in higher education social media marketing. The contents of the model were derived from a thorough literature analysis of relevant contributions and following that, the appropriateness of the model was confirmed in the empirical study conducted in this thesis. The empirical study conducted in this thesis was well suitable for answering and testing the general research question, as it verified the assumptions made in the framework model and it identified which of the social media qualities are most suitable for creating customer value.

Concerning the empirical study, one might criticize the fact that the sample of the survey spanned PLDs current customers, alumni and prospects, even though the main focus of this research is to create prospect customer value. Even though this objection and argument is

correct, I decided to analyze PLDs entire target group (current and prospect customers and alumni), as the future social media marketing strategy shall apply to all customers, however, with a special focus on prospects. Moreover, it is expected that by increasing the general customer value for all actual and potential customers and alumni, the reputation of the organization will be strengthened and further improved which will in turn generate more leads as more people are attracted. In order to ensure that the results of this thesis are not tarnished or misled by the answers of alumni and current students, in a future study it would be interesting to test only customer value creation for prospects and to see whether the results hold true or whether there are specific differences that should be taken care of.

If I had to do the survey research again, I would probably operate in the same way. However, if I had to send another online questionnaire to PLDs customers, I would probably send it in Dutch, in order to increase the response rate.

Regarding the data used in this study, in some cases it would have been nice to have more specific and up to date data such as with the competitor analysis, where the results from a benchmark from 2006 were used. However, within the limited time frames of this thesis, I had to rely on the former data, as it was not possible to conduct an entirely new benchmark first.

Summing up, it is expected that with the framework model as presented in this thesis and the results of the empirical study, the general research question of how prospect customer value can be created in higher education social media marketing is answered. The main research question *of how PLD can develop a social media strategy in order to strengthen the prospect customer value* has been answered in the form of practical recommendations provided, as the strategy presented in this paper creates additional customer value and thus new customers will be attracted while at the same time also keeping the old customers satisfied and tied to the organization.

To sum up, this research provides interesting insights into social media marketing in higher education. Not only were the qualities of knowledge and relationship identified to have a positive influence on the perceived customer value, but even more these values were used to set up a complete social media strategy which can serve as a concrete implementation plan for the department of Professional Learning and Development. Furthermore the strategy can serve as an example for the other educational programmes. The qualities defined above apply to PLDs whole target group. With a few adaptations and modifications (E.g. with regards to the contents and keywords) the strategy can be customized for the other educations as well.

However, as the quotation at the beginning of the thesis explains, a successful engagement in social media is a continuous effort. Regular control and improvements need to be made that include steps forward as well as possible steps backward so that in the end the value will be created for customers!

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Appendix

Appendix A – Survey Template

Cover letter sent with the online survey

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Christina Kohnke and I am a student of the University of Twente in Enschede, where I am participating in the Master Program “Business Administration – International Management”. I am currently working on my master thesis focusing on the optimization of the social media strategy for the department of Professional Learning and Development (PLD) at the University of Twente. The thesis is based on the results of a study conducted a few months ago and tries to further improve PLDs online marketing activities.

Within the scope of my thesis, I am conducting a scientific research for which your opinion is highly appreciated. Therefore I would kindly ask you for about 10-15 minutes of your time in order to fill out the questionnaire which you will find under the following link

???Survey Link???

The participation in this survey is anonymous. You will not be asked for personal information, so that it will be impossible to make any inferences about the individual participants.

In case you have any questions concerning the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me under *c.kohnke@student.utwente.nl*. Thank you very much for your help and participation in advance!

Kind regards,

Christina Kohnke

Template for the questions included in the online survey

This survey contains questions about your use of social media as well as about your opinion on the qualities of interaction, communication and Knowledge in value creation. The questionnaire is kept anonymous. The answers are used for a research on behalf of the department of Professional Learning and Development (PLD) at the University of Twente.

In case you have any questions concerning the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me under *c.kohnke@student.utwente.nl*. Thank you very much for your help and participation in advance!

General Information

1) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2) What is your age?

- Younger than 30 years
- 30 – 34 years
- 35 – 39 years
- 40 – 44 years
- 45 – 49 years
- 50 – 54 years
- 55 years or older

3) Which course do you follow? /did you follow? /are you interested in at the moment?

- Master Public Management
- Master Risico Management
- Leergang Management Woningcorporaties
- Leergang Bedrijf en Bestuur Waterschappen
- Masterclass Business in Asia
- Lokale Sociale Dienstverlening in Verandering
- Other, namely

4) Where are you currently employed? (Not compulsory)

.....

5) What is your highest degree?

- HBO
- WO
- Other, namely.....

6) How do you prefer to **TAKE NOTICE OF** higher education institutions/ how did you take notice of Professional Learning (PLD)?

	Always Prefer	Very often prefer	Often prefer	Not often prefer	Never prefer
Advertisements (e.g. advertisements in magazines, billboards, etc.)					
Print material such as brochures, flyers, etc. from schools					
Direct contacts with the schools					
Open days					
Recommendations from family, friends, acquaintances, etc.					
Official school websites					
Social networks (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, Hyves)					
Weblogs and Forums (e.g. written by fellow students, alumni, etc.)					
Online communities where other users can place and share information (e.g. YouTube, slideshare, etc.)					
Traditional Search engines such as Google or Bing					
Traditional rankings					

7. How do you prefer to **MAKE THE CHOICE** for a provider of higher education (Universiteit ,Hogeschool, other providers)?

	Always prefer	Very often prefer	Often prefer	Not often prefer	Never prefer
Advertisements (e.g. ads in magazines, billboards, etc.)					
Print material such as brochures, flyers, etc. from universities					
Direct contacts with the school					
Open days, etc.					
Recommendations from family, friends, acquaintances, etc.					
Official school websites					
Social networks (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, Hyves)					
Weblogs and Forums (e.g. written by fellow students, alumni, etc.)					
Online communities where other users can place and share information (e.g. YouTube, slideshare, etc.)					
Traditional Search engines such as Google or Bing					
Official rankings					

Question 8 up to and including question 14 deal with your social media and Internet usage. Social media means Internet based applications and Internet sites which people use to share opinions, perspectives and experiences and to stay in contact (networking). These include social networks, forums, blogs and online communities.

8. How often you usually access the Internet from:

	Several times a day	Once a day	Several times a week	Once per week	Several times a month	Once per month	Less than once per month
Home							
Work							
University/Educational institution							
Public place (e.g. café)							

9. Please rate on a scale from 1 to 4 (1=always; 4= never) which of the following you use most often to access the Internet:

	1	2	3	4
PC				
Laptop				
Tablet PC				
Mobile phone				

10. Indicate the frequency with which you carry out the following (passive) activities:

	Every day	Several times a week	Several times a month	Less than once a month	Almost never
Consult forums for information					
Reading reviews about products, news, etc.					
Consult blogs					
Consult distribution lists (in communities, groups)					
Make use of peer-to peer file sharing					

11. Indicate the frequency with which you carry out the following active activities:

	Every day	Several times a week	Several times a month	Less than once a month	Almost never
Participate in forums					
Send messages to distribution lists (in communities or groups)					
Publish content to your blog					
Comment on other blogs					
Design or adapt products through the Internet (co-creation)					

12. Are you an active account user of social networking sites (E.g. Facebook, Hyves)?

- Yes
- No (please continue with question 14)

13. Which of the following are motivations for you to use social media, especially social networking sites (E.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Hyves)?

- Entertainment
- For novelty
- Because it is fashionable
- Keep in touch with friends and acquaintances
- Get a sense of belonging
- Keep informed about news and events
- Keep informed about new products and their reviews
- Enlarge personal network
- Make new contacts, professional relations
- Other, namely

14. Do you remember seeing any advertisement from PLD on social networking sites lately (banners, links, etc.)?

- Yes
- No (please continue with question 16)

15. Do you normally click on these advertisements?

- Yes
- No

The following questions (16-18) deal with the quality of interaction and its impact on perceived customer value. Hereby networking activities and discussions with the school are important, as well as joint product development activities and projects.

16. In how far do you agree/ disagree with the following statements about your involvement and networking activities with your school?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have conducted or will conduct projects together with my school (E.g. joint product development)					
I frequently make referential statements towards my school and express agreement					
I frequently participate in discussions with my school and/or other students/alumni					
Through social networks I am connected to other students and alumni					

17. In how far do you agree/ disagree with the following statements about how interaction influences your decision making in the choice of an educational institution (University, school, etc.)?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The uniqueness of the product/service influences my decision for a school					
The variety of offers influences my decision for a school					
The ability to participate in the design of the education influences my decision for a school					
The ability to discuss with the school and other students and alumni influences my decision for a school					

18. In how far do you agree/disagree with the following statements about the value of interaction?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Through personal contributions I can increase my satisfaction with the service					
If I can participate in the design of the education, I can create a unique offer					
I feel personal recognition for the self-designed products if I can participate in the design of the education					
If I can participate in the design of the education I have the ability to design a service that specifically meets my needs					

Participating in the design of the education adds value to the educational service					
Through networking and discussions with alumni and other students I build up trust					
Through networking and discussions with alumni and other students I can get a stronger confidence in the school					
Through networking and discussions with alumni and other students I get a sense of belonging					
Networking adds value to the educational service					

The following questions (19-23) deal with the concept of knowledge and its influence on customer value. In this respect, the concept of online or distance learning is important. In online learning, courses and study materials are offered online, which provides geographical and temporal freedom for students. Education can take place in a purely online environment or through a combination of online and traditional education elements.

19. Do you already have experiences with online/distance learning?

- Yes
- No (please continue with question 21)

20. If yes, how was your experience?

- Rather positive
- Neutral
- Rather negative

21. In how far you agree/disagree with the following statements about your preparedness and willingness to use online learning?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am able to easily access the Internet as needed for my studies					
I am comfortable communicating electronically					
I am willing to actively communicate with my classmates and instructors electronically					
I feel that face-to-face contact with my instructor is necessary to learn					
Learning is the same in class and at home on the Internet					

22. In how far do you agree/ disagree with the following statements about how knowledge influences your decision making in the choice of an educational institution (University, school, etc.)?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
A wide variety of information influences my decision for a school					
High flexibility in the education influences my decision for a school					
High convenience in the education influences my decision for a school					
The opportunity for personal development influences my decision for a school					

23. In how far do you agree/disagree with the following statements about the value of online learning and entertainment?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Online learning provides me with temporal flexibility					
Online learning provides greater convenience by the opportunity to learn at home or at the office (local flexibility)					
Online learning contributes to my personal development					
Online learning provides an education which specifically meets my needs					
Learning videos or presentations can contribute to my personal development					
Learning videos or presentations can provide a wide variety of information					
Learning videos or presentations are convenient to use					
Online learning and entertainment add value to my education					

Questions 24 and 25 deal with the quality of relationship and its influence on customer value. Hereby customer dialogue and social presence (visibility on social media sites) shall be considered in more detail.

24. In how far do you agree/ disagree with the following statements about how relationship influences your decision making in the choice of an educational institution (University, school, etc.)?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Regular contacts with the school influence my decision for a school					
The quality of conversations influences my decision for a school					
A high social visibility of the school influences my decision for a school					

25. In how far do you agree/disagree with the following statements concerning the value of a customer-supplier dialogue and social presence of an educational institution?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Regular contact with the school increases the sense of confidence in the school					
Regular contact with the school increases the development of trust					
I feel more personal recognition through frequent conversations with my school					
A high conversation quality increases the satisfaction with the information flow of the service					
A high social visibility of the educational service provider increases the development of trust					
A high social visibility of the educational service provider increases the sense of confidence in the service provider					
A high social visibility of the educational service provider increases the curiosity and interest for the organization					
Regular contact with the school adds value to the education					

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your participation!

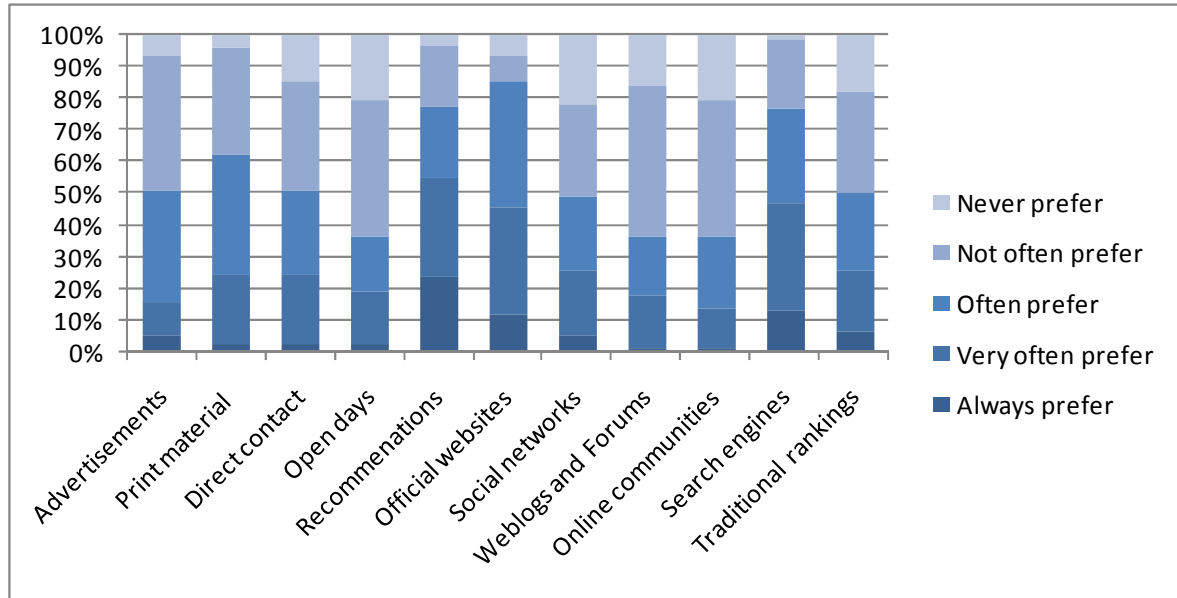
Appendix B - Detailed results survey

Social media usage

B.1

How do you prefer to take notice of higher education institutions? How did you take notice of PLD?

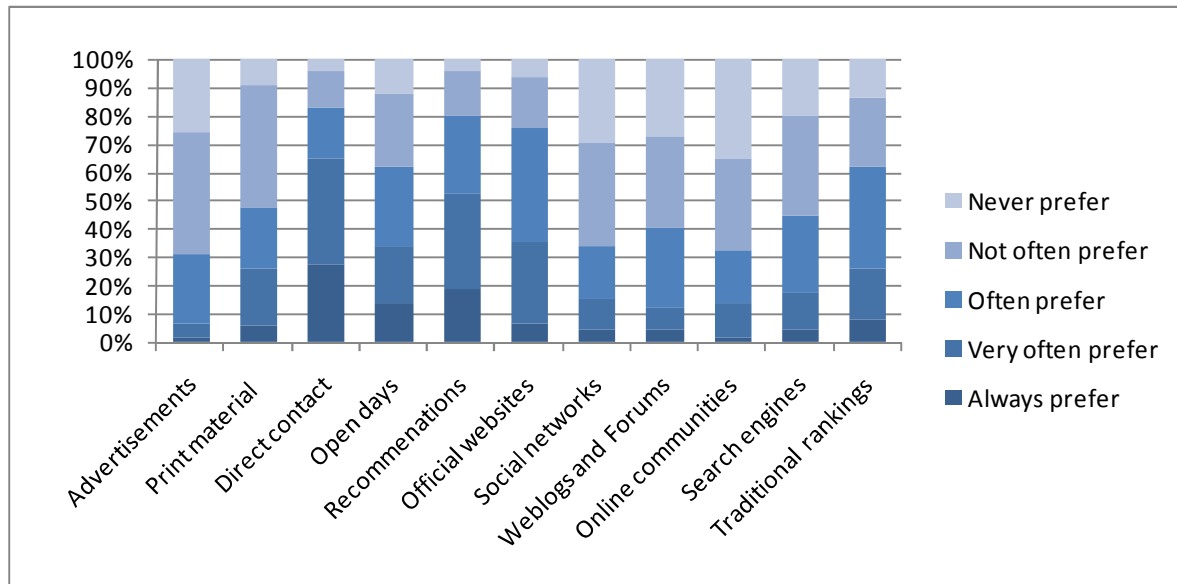
N=74



B.2

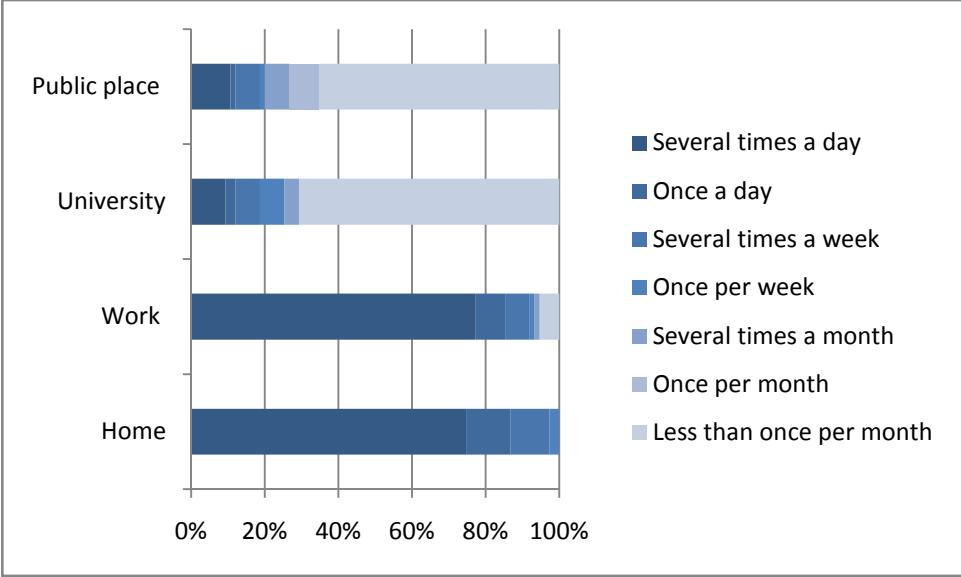
How do you prefer to make the choice for a provider of higher education?

N=74



B.3

How often do you usually access the Internet from:
N=75

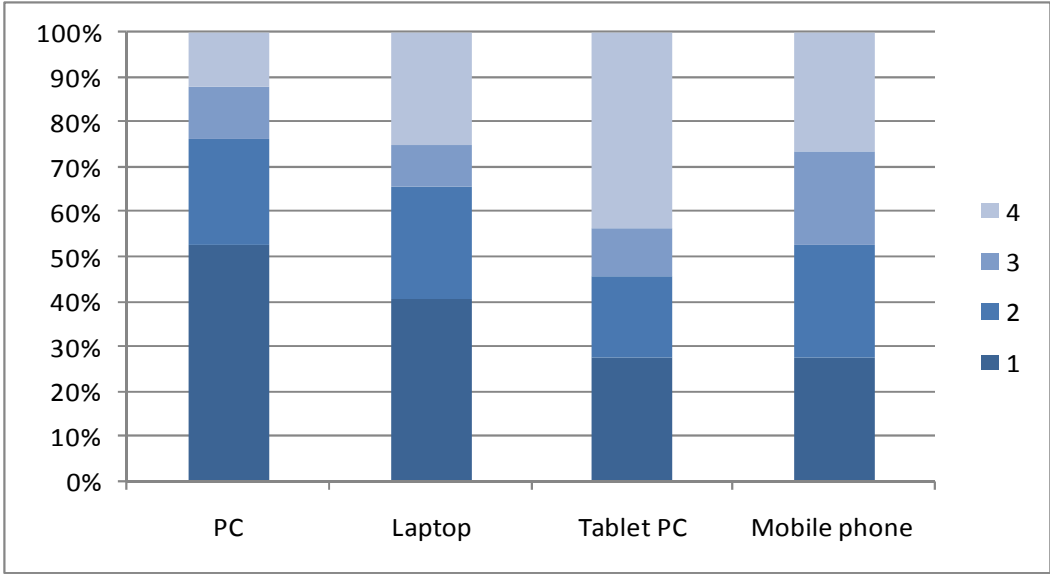


B.4

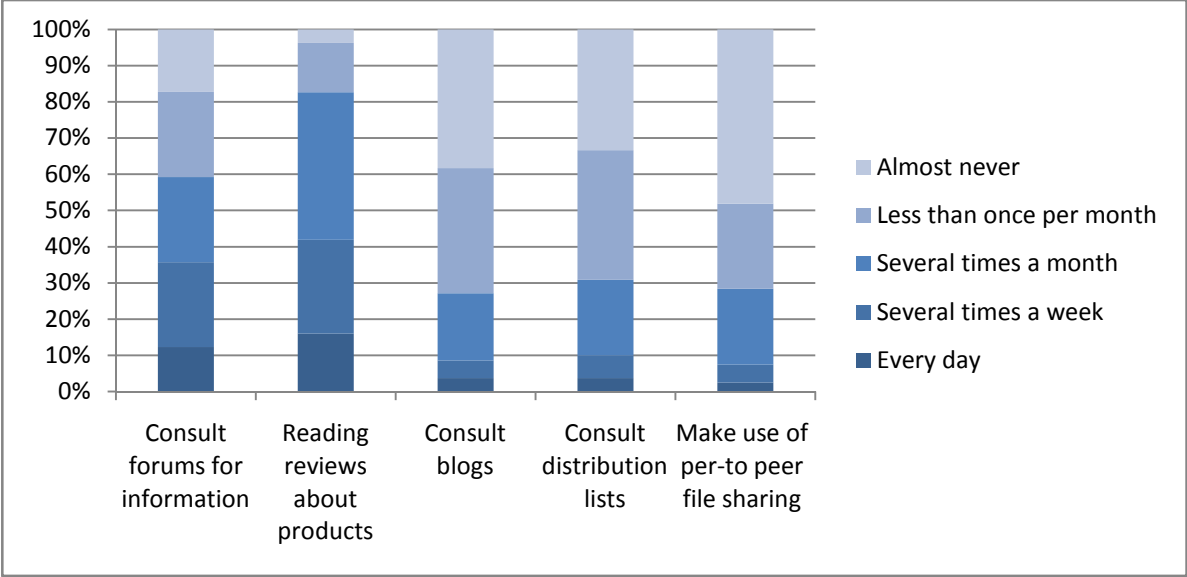
Please rate on a scale from 1 to 4 (1=always; 4= never) which of the following you use most often to access the Internet:

N=76

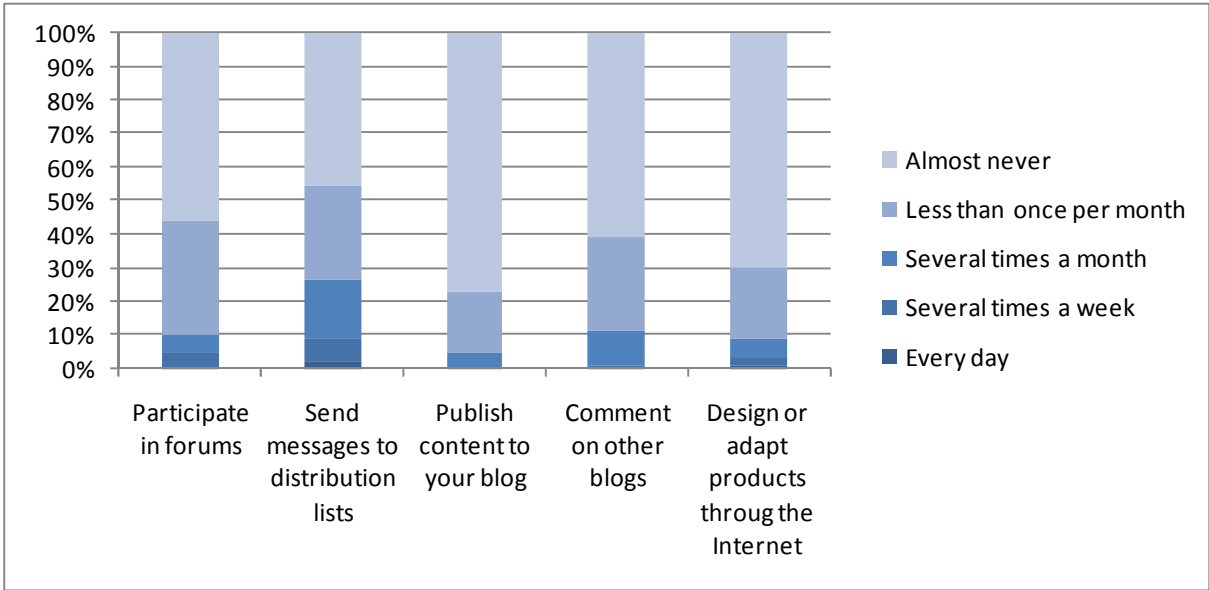
	Always				Never
	1	2	3	4	
PC	40	18	9	9	
Laptop	31	19	7	19	
Tablet PC	21	14	8	33	
Mobile phone	21	19	16	20	



B.5
Frequency of carrying out passive activities
N=81



B.6
Frequency of carrying out active activities
N=79



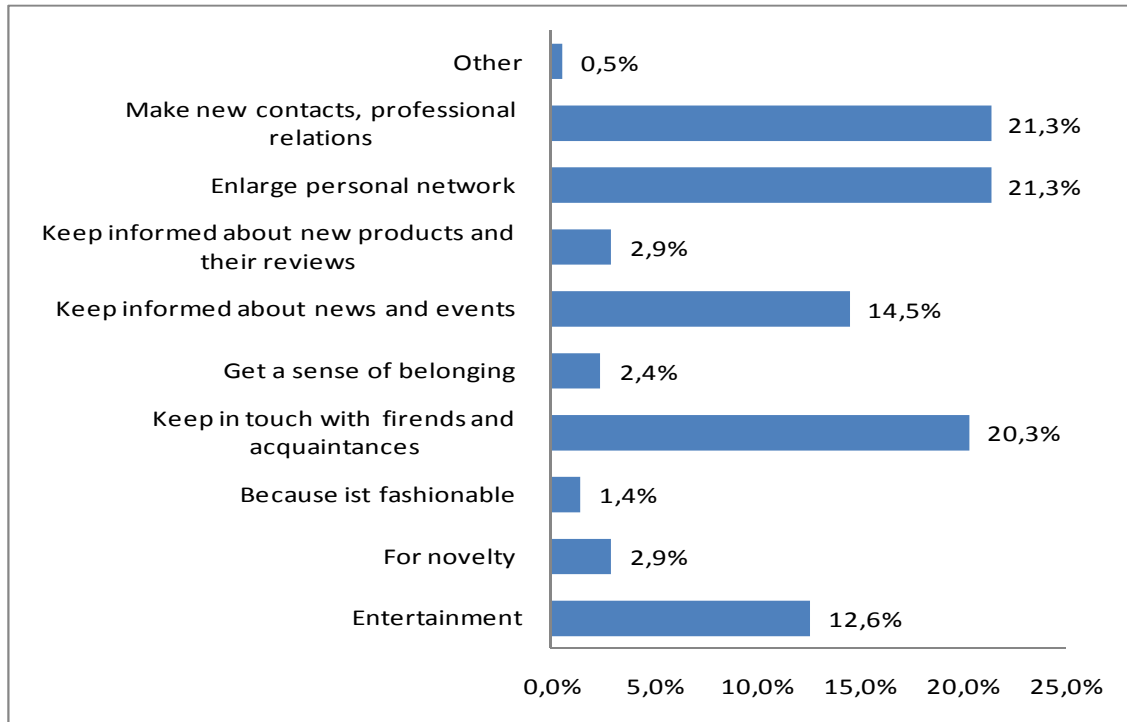
B.7
Are you an active user of social networking sites?
N=82

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	63	76,8
No	19	23,2
Total	82	100

B.8

Motivations for use of social networks

N=63 (only people who actively use social networks)



B.9

Do you remember seeing any advertisements from Professional Learning (PLD) lately?

N=82

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	14,6
No	70	85,4
Total	82	100

B.10

Do you normally click on these advertisements?

N=12

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	25
No	9	75
Total	12	100

B.11

Experiences with online learning

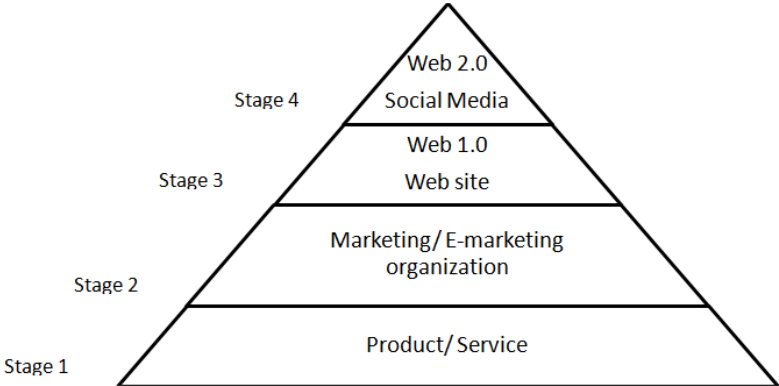
N=82

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	32	39
No	50	61
Total	82	100

B.12
Evaluation of experience
N=32

	Frequency	Percent
Rather positive	22	68,8
Neutral	10	31,2
Rather negative	0	0
Total	32	100

Appendix C – The marketing strategy pyramid



Source : Constantinides, Romero & Gomez (2008)

Appendix D – Interview template internal analysis

Questionnaire Internal analysis

Name:

Position within PLD:

Main tasks:

Do you have customer contact?

- Yes
 - No
-

Services/ Products

The following questions refer to the perception of service quality provided by PLD. High quality products or services form the basis of the online marketing strategy. They build the unique selling proposition and reflect the organization's image. In this respect it is highly important to offer high standard and innovative products/services that satisfy customer's needs

1. Do you receive feedback from customers?
 - Yes
 - No

2. If yes, is the feedback predominantly positive or negative?
 - Positive
 - Negative

3. In your opinion, what do customers value most about PLD's services/offers? What are PLD's strengths?
 - Quality of lectures
 - Price
 - Flexibility of offers
 - Support and Supervision
 - Quick responses
 - Variety of offers
 - Image/ Reputation
 - Other

4. How do you differentiate yourself from other providers of educational services?
 - Price
 - Additional Services
 - Better quality
 - Superior Support
 - Image/reputation
 - Other

5. Where do you see room for improvements? Possible Weaknesses?
 - Flexibility provided
 - Quality of services
 - Support and Supervision
 - Variety of offers
 - Image
 - Other
-

Marketing Organization

The next set of questions refers to the marketing organization of PLD. A market-oriented organization is necessary to support the marketing activities, which is especially true for online marketing activities.

6. Is the organization well developed? Are the tasks with regards to social media clear?
 7. How is your department organized? Who is responsible for online marketing activities?
 8. How does the first customer contact usually take place?
 - Phone
 - E-mail
 - Personal
 - Post
 - Other
 -
 9. What do you think how people take notice of PLD?
 - Brochures
 - Word-of mouth
 - Internet
 - Social Media
 - Advertisements in magazines
 - Other
-

Web 1.0/ Website

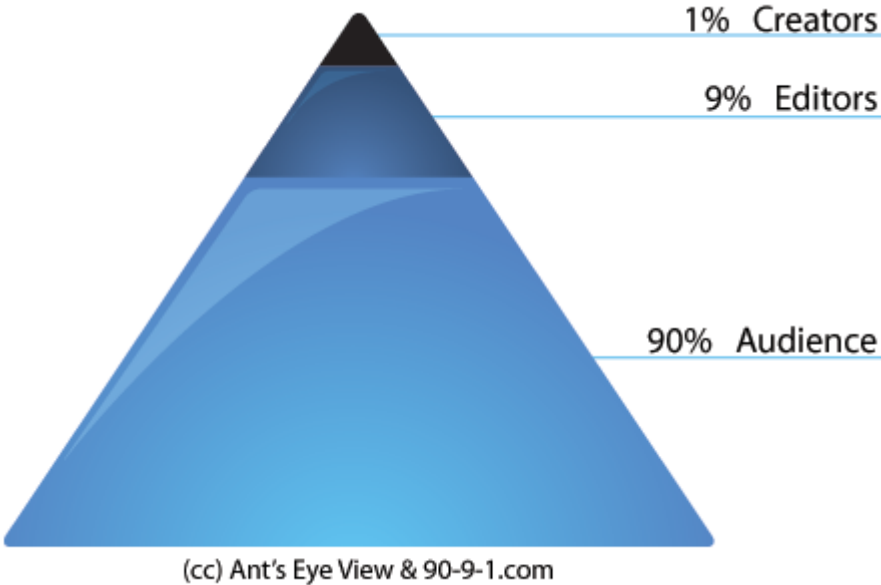
Another critical condition for the inclusion of web 2.0 and social media in the marketing strategy is that the web 1.0 applications are well established. Therefore the following questions focus on the web 1.0 activities of PLD.

10. Which information do you think are customers looking for at the company website?
 - Courses
 - About PLD (organization, etc.)
 - News
 - Events
 - Other
 11. What is your opinion about PLD's website?
-

Web 2.0/ Social media

12. What is currently done in social media?

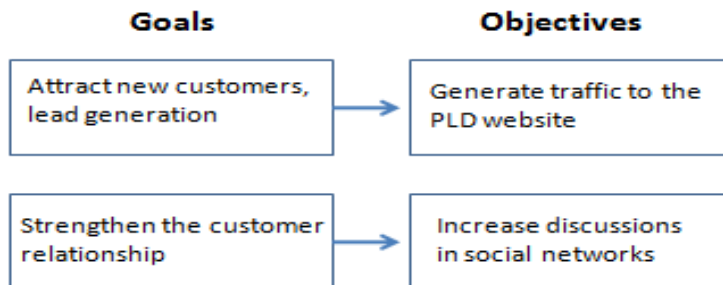
Appendix E - The 90-9-1 Principle



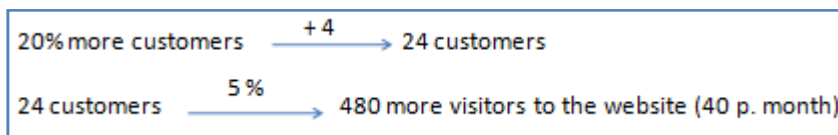
Source: <http://www.antseyeview.com/90-9-1-principle/>

Appendix F - Guidelines exemplary Social media strategy MPM

Goals and Objectives



- In the long term (12 months) PLD strives towards a 20% increase of customers
- With a conversion rate of people who visited the website of about 5%, in order to reach a 20% increase in customers, about 480 more people have to visit the PLD website, which is 40 people per month



Contents and tone

- *Contents*: Political topics, opinions or topics related to their work field. Furthermore news and information about PLD, such as upcoming events or contents of the educations
- Use of relevant keywords to improve the appearance of the website in customer searches (E.g. Publieke organisaties, Politieke besluitvorming, etc.)
- *Tone*: The tone in PLDs communication should be businesslike. It should convey a competent image of the organizations. Moreover, the tone should be open and inviting so as to encourage dialogue and conversations

Planning

- Focus strategy on the qualities of *entertainment and relationship (dialogue)* as these two qualities can help to create customer value and thus to attract and bind customers.
- Determine responsible person for supervising PLDs social media marketing activities and the website regularly
- Create a staff plan which generally organizes which employee should twitter or post in LinkedIn at which day
- Identify influencers and encourage them to post their opinions (E.g. professors and lecturers from the courses or important personalities from the public industry)

Platforms and actions

- Focus on paid and owned media to reach earned media
- Paid: Web banners, paid search, SEO
- Owned: Concentrate on existing channels in LinkedIn and Twitter as well as on the website. Furthermore, YouTube and slideshare present interesting opportunities

	Medium	Activities	Maintenance	Expected customer increase per month
Entertainment	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display current topics and news • Provide entertaining elements such as presentations from symposia or image videos 	Once per week	+ 40
	YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display videos • Create a link to the PLD website 	Every three months	+ 10
	Slideshare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place presentations/ summaries from symposia • Materials from the PLD courses • Reference to the PLD website 	Every three months	+ 5
Dialogue	LinkedIn and Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce the latest internal news and PLD events • Discuss interesting industry news • Frequent references to the website 	Twitter: every 1-2 days LinkedIn: 3 times a week	+ 10
Other	SEO, Paid search, blog entries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keyword analysis 		+ 15

Control

- Use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to evaluate performance and google analytics
- *Goal of fostering dialogue with customers:* followers on LinkedIn and Twitter, audience engagement, the conversation reach as well as the share of voice
- *Goal of transferring traffic to the PLD website:* number of visitors to the website, platforms from which people were directed to the website
- *Overall:* determine whether the defined targets of 20% more customers in the MPM could be realized