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Flying Over Social Media Strategies

Exploring the current state of the field and analyzing the social media strategies of two German airlines

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

This thesis combines a systematic literature research, including 66 analyzed academic articles, regarding the prevalent approaches to social media strategies with the findings of case studies conducted with two German airlines, namely TUIfly and Germania, for the purpose of investigating their strategic social media usage. The main research question aims at defining and exploring the term social media strategy and, simultaneously, determining potential impacts of such strategies on the airlines' social media operations.

The research shows that the opinions vary about the exact definitions of a social media strategy. The developed classification is that a social media strategy equates to an elaborate but flexible plan of activities for optimally deploying social media tools in order to create an interactive network of customers that generates business value to the company. The majority of the authors of the reviewed literature, however, agree on the elements a social media strategy framework should comprise and focus on. These elements are resources, policies, goals, target audience, social media choice, action plan, and monitoring. This framework was integrated into the PDCA cycle of Deming and, thus, transformed into a process focused on continuous improvement. The prevalent frameworks identified in the literature research dominantly view social media as a channel to advertise and conduct market research. A rare focus on interaction and engagement on social media is visible in several frameworks, although their importance was indicated throughout the majority of reviewed sources.

The case studies offer insights into the social media operations of the two airlines based on their specifications given in questionnaires and a four-week enduring observational study of their online activities. In these specific cases, a direct relationship between the success of the social media presence and the deployment of strategic concepts behind it was not found. Both airlines have a large audience on their Facebook platforms and regularly manage to attract the attention of their followers. Both airlines gained the highest response rates with interactive posts and questions targeted at the audience. Furthermore, a low variety of channels was observed in the studied cases, which leads to the assumption that the term social media strategy might only be a synonym for a Facebook or Twitter strategy. Both airlines were furthermore investigated to fail at completing the PDCA cycle and, thus, do not evaluate and adapt their social media operations as recommended.

For evaluating the current social media strategies, a recommendation is provided for integrating the SMS7 framework by Effing (2013) into the PDCA cycle and adding the elements of listening and content, for their relevance was identified in the theoretical as well as in the practical part of this thesis.

After all, the findings of this thesis suggest that the importance of deploying a social media strategy for achieving success on the online networks as outlined in the academic literature is questionable.

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1 INTRODUCTION

"However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results"

Sir Winston Churchill (n.d.)

Organizations have always deployed strategies for their various operations. Strategic positioning is a favored technique that is portrayed as relevant in order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Porter, 1996). Social media were added to the pool of strategic activities in the last decade. Companies are now rethinking their business strategies due to the rise of social media (Fraser & Dutta, 2008; Peters et al., 2013). Social media are everywhere today; more than 1.3 billion users operate a personal or corporate page on its biggest platform (Facebook, 2014), which equates to almost one-fifth of the total world population. It is a powerful phenomenon that changed the social interaction globally. Therefore, it is crucial for companies today to engage in social networks in order to be competitive on the market (Burkhalter et al., 2014; Othman et al., 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Larson & Watson, 2011). The usage of social media for communication with customers is inevitable nowadays, whether it is for advertising products or services, answering consumer questions and complaints or for information purposes. Social media are changing the way businesses are conducted with representing a low-cost platform for personal branding (Dutta, 2010), and regardless of the company size or industry, social media marketing has become a mandatory element of a company's marketing strategy (Hanna et al., 2011). Therefore, numerous recently published articles discuss the operations of social media for corporate purposes.

One sector that appears to be an important ambassador of social media is the airline industry, where today most of the sales are made virtually through online ticket booking. Social media as an online marketing tool has grown in importance over the last years in the tourism sector (Hvass & Munar, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, Hsu, 2012). Since this is an information intensive sector, social media is predominantly used in tourism companies and hence air carriers as a communication channel (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2013) for providing customers with relevant information. A study found that airlines do indeed use social media very frequently ranging from full service carriers to low cost carriers, whereas the use is found to be "*heavily advertising focused*" (Hvass & Munar, 2013, p. 99). The purpose of social media usage depends on the platforms used. On Twitter for example, airlines were seen to be more engaged in posts about their social activities and public relations, while Facebook was mainly used for advertising and selling

activities (Hvass & Munar, 2013). Another research investigating the content of airlines' Facebook pages found that about 70% of the 250 largest airlines operate an official Facebook page and a third of these use this platform as a sales channel (Grančay, 2013). The rest was found to use Facebook for informatory purposes, with posting photographs as well as facts about the airlines.

However, it became clear that there is a lack of strategies for engaging in social media of the airlines; the airlines were investigated to lack continuity in their usage of user-generated content platforms (Hvass & Munar, 2012) and only a limited number of companies in the travel sector were found to strategically study and use social media to their advantage, whereas the majority uses social media rather experimentally (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). This problem is not only present in the airline industry; a lack of social media strategies and a predominant difficultly in developing these strategies is likewise observed in other sectors (Linke & Zerfass, 2013; Heath, Singh & Ganesh, 2013; Munar, 2012). Social media are a quite newly communication channel that are indeed widely used, but their results are only narrowly researched. Many executives are, therefore, hesitant or even unable to develop strategies in order to deploy social media effectively (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and only few marketers operate within a systematic approach to comprehend and manage their organization's social media strategy (Hanna et al., 2011). A lacking knowledge about how social media should function for professional purposes leads to poorly executed social media efforts in organizations (Palmer 2013); therefore, increasing the know-how of corporate and strategic social media usage might improve organizations' results in this area.

The knowledge gap regarding an evaluation of the appropriateness of existing social media strategies presents the research problem of this thesis. This is primary aimed to be solved with a research of the state of the social media strategy field in the academic literature. Furthermore, for the purpose of investigating the strategic social media usage in practice, case studies undertaken with two German airlines are conducted, combining the completion of questionnaires with observations of their social media platforms. These cases aid in solving the uncertainty whether airlines deploy social media strategically or if their usage of the online platforms happens in a rather intuitive, reactive and, thus, spontaneous way. The combination of these two research methods will provide valuable material for an evaluation of the existing frameworks and recommendations for possible improvements to the current concepts.

The main research question of this thesis is therefore:

What is a social media strategy and how does it impact the social media operations of airlines?

In order to answer the main question as precisely as possible, the following sub questions have been developed to get a proper overview of the topic and an in-depth understanding of the most important elements.

1. *What are social media?*
2. *What is a social media strategy?*
3. *What are the prevailing frameworks in this area?*
4. *What are the elements of a social media strategy?*
5. *What social media strategies are used by the two studied airlines?*
6. *How do the airlines' social media strategies impact their social media operations?*
7. *Should airlines deploy social media strategies and how should they do it?*

After outline the academic and practical relevance of this topic, the thesis will continue with the description of its methodology. Afterwards, the findings of the systematic literature review will be discussed. Chapter 4 will include the case studies with their specifications, the description of the execution as well as the results. The thesis will then offer an analysis of all results and end with the conclusion and the discussion of the findings.

1.1 Academic Relevance

There is a lack of existing knowledge regarding social media strategies as well as their appliance. Most articles only present the definition of social media platforms and various ways of utilizing them but fail to inform about systematic approaches. This research will contribute to the existing literature in relation to the strategic use of social media. The outcome of this research is academically relevant, since it combines the knowledge of previous studies in the scientific literature and already available concepts regarding social media strategies with the outcome of case studies and its findings from the conducted questionnaires and the social media sites' observations. This will result in new conclusions regarding existing concepts within social media strategies and their applicability to organizations.

1.2 Practical relevance

For managers it is essential to know the prevailing elements of a social media strategy in order to close the comprehension gap about the possibilities of social media platforms in general and their ideal usage in organizations (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). With identifying

the main factors of such a strategy, companies can overcome the challenge of deploying social media strategically and, hence, successfully (Heath, Singh & Ganesh, 2013; Wilson et al., 2011). Managers can benefit from the in depth research about social media strategies, since the topic is relevant for the success of every organization today (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). More strategic consideration when communicating via social media is required (Linke & Zerfass, 2013) and, thus, it is crucial for companies to evaluate their social media strategies with regard to the prevailing findings in the scientific literature in order to stay competitive and constantly adapt to the fast moving environment, which the Internet and, therefore, the social networks most certainly are. Furthermore, companies can learn how well their own corporate usage complies with the strategic frameworks aimed at profiting from social networks. The evaluated and improved strategic concepts can, moreover, serve as a valuable guideline for the airlines as well as other companies in any sector to decide on the design of their individual social media usage and simplify the process of creating plans for a successful online presence.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this thesis is divided into two parts. The first part comprises a systematic literature research and the second part includes case studies, consisting of the findings from questionnaires and an observational study.

Primarily, the method of the systematic literature research will be described. The topic of this literature review is the social media strategies. The aim of this literature review is to discover relevant literature including existing frameworks and models regarding social media strategies. With the usage of different search queries, literature will be retrieved from the electronic databases of the Web of Science and Scopus. The focus lies on the most recent literature, starting from the publishing year 2005. Every step of this search will be listed in order to get an overview of the existing literature and which of the findings are in fact valuable for this study.

First, different relevant keywords and search queries were selected. Synonyms for the main keywords 'social media' and 'strategy' are taken into account, including the words 'social network sites' and 'web 2.0', and the four most popular social media tools Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, as well as the keywords 'policy' and 'governance'. A pre-selection was made for only the subject areas of Physical Science and Social Science & Humanities, excluding the categories of Life Science and Health Science, for they lack coherence with this thesis' subject. The literature search resulted in a great amount of articles. In order to select

only the relevant articles for this study, a first scan through the article titles served as a disregard mechanism. Articles with topics related to mainly 'privacy', 'user-modeling' or 'education' were disregarded. This simplified the process of excluding non-related literature. This scan already eliminated most of the prior found sources, which resulted in, hence, a total of 118 articles. These were then retrieved from the Web of Science and Scopus. The abstracts from the remaining articles were then carefully read and selected in the case they were assessed as relevant. Finally, a total of 66 articles were extracted for this thesis. These articles were then read, analyzed, summarized and critically evaluated for the literature review.

The following table presents the selection process of the articles relevant for this project.

Table 1 Systematic Literature Review

Search query (art., abs., keyw.) 2005	Scopus results	Scopus selected	WOS results	WOS selected	Total results	Total selected
"social media" AND "strategy"	945	35	211	13	1156	48
"web 2.0" AND "strategy"	748	6	174	5	922	11
"social network site" AND "strategy"	79	0	10	0	89	0
"social media" AND "policy"	516	9	255	1	771	10
"web 2.0" AND "policy"	360	1	121	0	481	1
"social network site" AND "policy"	38	0	14	0	52	0
"social media" AND "governance"	130	3	54	2	184	5
"web 2.0" AND "governance"	107	1	57	1	164	2
"social network site" AND "governance"	17	0	1	0	18	0
"facebook" AND "strategy"	482	11	103	5	585	16
"twitter" AND "strategy"	405	8	67	5	472	13
"linkedIn" AND "strategy"	39	2	4	0	43	2
"youTube" AND "strategy"	220	7	50	3	270	10
Total selected:						118
Total selected items without redundancies:						109
Total selected items based on reading abstracts:						**66**

Regarding the metadata of this literature review, the relevance as well as the currentness of the topic can be seen in the year numbers most of the chosen articles have been published. Most articles are from 2013; however, already a lot of articles from the present year have been assessed as relevant and, thus, selected, as well as mainly sources from the years 2012 and 2011. The main discipline that contributed to this thesis is Management & Governance, followed by Information Science. Most of the sources utilized an exploratory research method, followed by numerous case studies. The majority of the sources are journal articles. The exact numbers and divisions can be found in the appendix (A1).

The second part of the research project utilizes case studies with organizations from one tourism sector, namely the airline industry. The decision for case study research is based on its purpose; case studies aim to explore and describe a complex setting with the view to advancing understanding of it (Cousin, 2005), which represents the aim of this thesis, since there is a lack of real-life cases that aim to evaluate the existing strategic frameworks mainly due to the novelty of social media strategies. Yin (2003) supports this purpose with his opinion that case studies are supposed to "*investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context [...] when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not [yet] clearly evident*" (p. 13). In order to achieve a representative outcome, a collective case study research method is selected, whereby more than once case is investigated for being able to compare the appliance and approach of, in this case, the social media usage of the studied airlines. Supporting the exploratory research method with the aid of the findings of case studies was identified as appropriate in order to test the existing strategic frameworks.

The case study research consists of two sections. Firstly, questionnaires with the study participants were conducted and secondly, the social media activities of these companies were observed. These two methods are considered as two of the six sources of evidence most commonly used for conducting case study research as defined by Yin (2003). Both sources will be described below.

The study participants for the completion of interview questionnaires were intended to be several airlines from the German airline industry. The contacted organizations for the interviews included the German carriers Lufthansa, Germanwings, Condor, Air Berlin, TUIfly and Germania. These airlines were selected as study objects, since they represent the biggest and leading German airlines and together compose the six members of the German Federal Association of Airlines ('Bundesverband der deutschen Fluggesellschaften'). Two German airlines, namely TUIfly and Germania, agreed to participate in the study. Gathering information about these carriers in the German airline industry will provide a sufficient background for making statements about their social media applications and for evaluating the success of these two organizations with regard to social media. The airlines are contacted via telephone and online contact forms, namely the 'social media newsroom' of their websites. The participants range from social media managers to assistants of online sales and marketing of the airlines. The interview questionnaires discussed a set of topics to gain the most valuable knowledge for this project. The questionnaires comprise a qualitative outline, which was selected due to the importance of words and their meanings regarding the studied strategy. The questionnaire, therefore, includes standardized and open-ended questions, so that the

study participants are asked identical questions, which simultaneously leave the interviewee with large freedom to respond. The objective of these interviews is to retrieve all possible information about the airlines' social media usage, their social media strategies and their social media strategy evaluation. The results are then analyzed and compared with regard to the utilized theoretical framework explained in chapter 3.3.

The second section of the case study research consists of an observation of the social media activities of both participating airlines. For this method, all existing social media platforms of both airlines are analyzed for a period of four weeks. The published posts of the companies are investigated for characteristics such as post types, amount of likes, shares and comments as well as content of the posts. This observation aims to provide insights into the actual online behavior of these two cases. Moreover, the outcome of the above described questionnaires will serve as an information base for investigating if the airlines' specifications relate to their actual social media operations. Thus, the observations of the social media sites aim to show if the theoretical findings from the interviews can be linked to the practice.

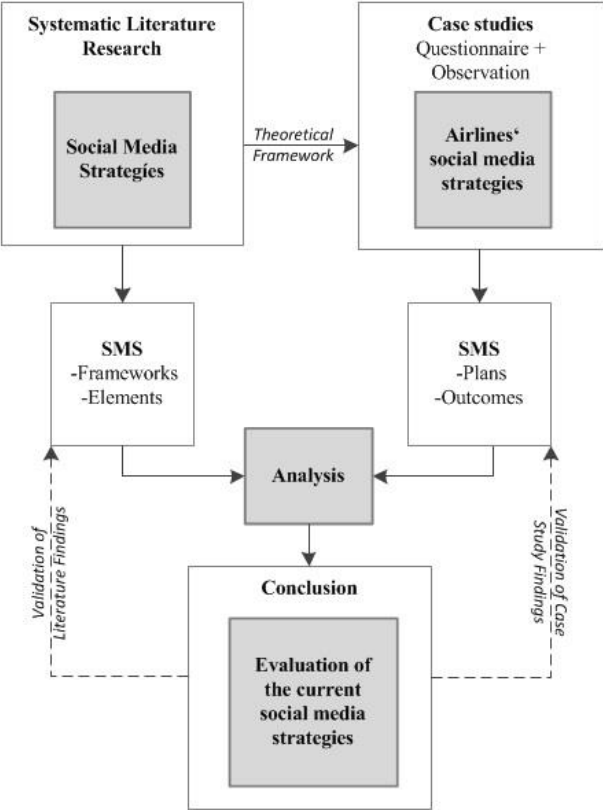The following figure is a graphic illustration of the described methodology.

Figure 1: Research Model

The model demonstrates the relation between the two different research methods for the process of answering the overall research question and, hence, evaluating the current social

media strategies. The theoretical framework by Effing (2013), thereby, connects these methods with theories. Whereas the literature review is conducted to propose frameworks and define elements of a social media strategy, the case studies aim to show the actual social media strategy plans of the airlines and the practical outcomes of their social media strategies. The results of both methods are then combined and jointly analyzed, which will occur in chapter 5. The conclusion serves as a critical approach to the validation of the overall findings.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The content of the articles analyzed for the systematic literature review clarified the answers to the following four sub questions.

3.1. What are social media?

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have been selected to provide the definition of social media for this thesis, since their classification is the most cited definition among the retrieved articles. They identify social media as *"a group of Internet-based applications [...] that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content"* (p.61). They further divide the term social media into six categories: (1) collective projects (e.g. Wikipedia), (2) blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), (3) content communities (e.g. YouTube), (4) social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), (5) virtual gaming worlds and (6) virtual social worlds (e.g. SecondLife). Shen and Bissell (2013) further classify social media for corporate purposes as a *"means of engaging and interacting with followers, fans and consumers"* (p.629). Due to the high value and the impact social media might have on business performances (Hanna et al., 2011; Arvidsson & Holmström, 2013; Leeflang et al., 2014; Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012), organizations seek for strategies in order to optimally operate these platforms (Linke & Zerfass, 2013; Yadav et al. 2013; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013; DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013). The term social media strategy will be defined and explained in the following part.

3.2. What is a social media strategy?

In order to define the term social media strategy, it is first essential to define a strategy. The term strategy is predominantly cited in the literature through the words of Porter (1996) defining it as the *"creation of a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities"* (p.68).

Keeping this definition in mind, a first key finding of this systematic literature review is the presence of various differing opinions as to what a social media strategy is or what it should be. The following part will include the prevailing definitions and meanings the numerous authors propose regarding a social media strategy, which are divided into two sections, firstly elaborating on the purpose and afterwards on the parts and characteristics of a social media strategy. This part ends with the chosen definition of a social media strategy.

Purpose of a social media strategy

Most of the articles agree on the purpose of a social media strategy *to guide a firm's social media presence and preferably optimize it* (Devillers, 2013; Palmer, 2013; Ang, 2011; See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). Utilizing social media in such a way that companies' are able to create value from it and gain a competitive advantage in the market, is the targeted objective of a social media strategy. Next to the efficiency of the strategy, companies should also thrive for differentiation, thus, they need to be willing to perform social media activities, which set them apart from their competitors (Ang, 2011). Goldner (2013) describes the way of achieving success in social media usage through 'optimizing the sharing of your brand' (p.7.). Devillers (2013) goes a little more in depth as to what he envisions a social media optimization, namely the increase of traffic, comments or Facebook 'likes' of companies' social media pages. This is a very specific description of a broader intended social media strategy definition for this thesis. A social media strategy is also said to be an object to improve the brand equity of the company deploying it (See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). The optimization of social media usage is also seen as the opening of opportunities for users to interact with each other through certain applications and websites on social media and retrieve business value for the specific firm from this occurring customer network (Ang, 2011; Yadav et al., 2013). Hence, social media strategy in this case represents the initialization of conversations among people with similar interests that may result in the value creation of the company, but does not view this as the primary and foremost purpose. Heath and colleagues (2013) classified social media strategy similarly with their opinion that a social media strategy should motivate users to engage and simultaneously take certain actions which in turn advance the companies' goals and interests.

Another view on a social media strategy is its purpose to reduce the risk of these web 2.0 applications (Wilson et al., 2011; Palmer, 2013). Companies are forced to have an online presence nowadays in order to be competitive (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, Dunn, 2010) but that does not necessarily imply that there are no risks involved. For numerous companies,

social media still present a challenge (Wilson et al., 2011) that they need to approach and preferably overcome. A risk of being exposed to millions of online users following misbehaviors by the company about handling product issues or customer complaints is always present. For a better overview and a reduced likeliness of such incidents, the responsibilities and certain tasks divided among the staff need to be clearly defined (Meijer & Thaens, 2013). This determination is also referred to as deploying social media policies. These policies aim at guiding the workflow processes and governing the corporate communication on web 2.0 platforms (Palmer, 2013; See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). Gotterbarn (2012) states that an effective social media policy is supposed to maximize the positive possibilities for the company to take advantage of these platforms while minimizing their negative impacts. Social media strategy or social media policy are often used interchangeably for they share the purpose of a safe and risk-free deployment of social media. Simultaneously, measuring the impact of social media is key for a company's social media strategy in order to minimize the risk of reputational damage (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013).

Social media strategy is further defined as a sort of action plan to measure social media influences (See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). This plan should argue how a firm acts on issues such as monitoring and responding to social media activities (Kietzmann et al., 2011). It should, furthermore, align the social media presence with overall business objectives and demonstrate a best practice for social media implementation (See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). The action plan is also an outline for daily posting schedules (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013) that are supposed to guide the firm to the optimal utilization of social media platforms. This view on social media strategy, describing it as interchangeable with a type of step-by-step plan to deploy social media in companies is a further possible interpretation of this term. This approach, however, does not include actions to take in order to prevent or minimize risks associated with an online presence.

Parts and characteristics of a social media strategy
Several authors equate the subject of a social media strategy to the selection of relevant technological tools (Rodriguez-Donaire, 2012; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013; Arvidsson & Holmström, 2013). Being it either the choice of specific social media tools that aim at information production or information-vetting processes (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013), or more generally the decision for technology in order to couple social media to a set of organizational tasks (Meijer & Thaens, 2013). Hence, the decision for the right IT and appropriate tools, which build the foundation of a companies'

social media presence and support its usage, is an additional approach to a social media strategy definition.

Several sources point out that an alignment between the social media activities and overall business goals is a crucial part of any social media strategy (Palmer, 2013; Arvidsson & Holmström, 2013). Companies should thus not try to present an image on their social media platforms that does not align with their companies' public perception. An integration of the organization with its environment (Arvidsson & Holmström, 2013) as well as coherence between the organizations' public statements or posts and its core mission and vision statements present a fundament to a successful social media strategy.

Regardless of how clearly social media strategies are defined and implemented in a company, it is important to leave some room for experimentation in order for social media usage to succeed (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). This is mainly because social media are part of such a fast changing environment where it is also essential to listen to trends and be able to frequently adopt changes to the strategies. Munar (2012) states that it is difficult to arrange long-term strategies with the constantly changing platforms and newly upcoming tools and suggests that a less formalized approach with employing innovation strategies based on trial and error with previous experiences should serve as the main focus for social media managers. Therefore, deploying social media applications in a firm needs to be viewed as a living and dynamic process (Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012; Rodrigues-Donaire, 2012). Organizational redesign regarding technological advancements in social media should always be expected and feasible for the concerned company (Arvidsson & Holmström, 2013). Strict bureaucracy and resistance to change are misplaced in the social media management. Furthermore, there is also not a one size fits all social media strategy (Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012; Berthon et al., 2012). A customization of this strategy for each firm is required in order to align it with the specific country's culture or local preferences regarding technologies and interests.

Social media strategy definition
The chosen definition of a social media strategy takes both the aforementioned purpose of such a strategy as well as its parts and characteristics into account. The definition used for this thesis is, therefore, that a social media strategy represents an elaborate but flexible plan of activities for optimally deploying social media tools in order to create an interactive network of customers that generates business value to the company and, simultaneously, incorporates

policies to avoid fatal consequences from utilizing these platforms for corporate communications.

3.3. What are the prevailing frameworks in this area?

The following part presents the concepts that are discussed in the reviewed literature and hence provides an overview of the existing knowledge in this area.

Theoretical framework

The first model that will be described is the SMS7 framework developed by Effing (2013). This framework is, simultaneously, the theoretical framework of this thesis and presents the guideline for the evaluation of the social media strategies in the literature. The SMS7 framework, displayed in figure 2, includes seven elements of engaging in a social media strategy, namely goals, target audience, social media choice, resources, policies, monitoring and activity plan. These elements will, moreover, represent the outline for the questionnaire structure and serve as the context for the posed questions mentioned in chapter 4. The interview questions were designed with the goal of gathering all relevant facts about the airlines' individual approaches to these seven elements.

This framework was chosen due to its broad integration of critical areas that taken together represent an adequate view of required conditions to consider while forming a social media strategy. Other frameworks fail to combine all relevant conditions for operating social media successfully and are rather focused on perfecting single elements.

Figure 2: SMS7 Framework (Effing, 2013)

In order to behold this framework as a circular process, the PDCA cycle developed by William E. Deming (Neave, 1990), consisting of the steps Plan, Do, Check, Act, was chosen to support the process of defining and classifying all elements. The PDCA cycle is a famous four-step improvement cycle predominantly used in business management (Neave, 1990). It is applicable to the area of social media strategies and, hence, to this framework, due to the novelty of the business field and the frameworks' presence in the developing stage. Moreover, the PDCA cycle's primary purpose is to deliver continuous improvement to business processes (Neave, 1990), and social media operations in firms equate to a continual process.

For the SMS7 elements, the division can be made as follows: (1) Plan: Goals, Policies; (2) Do: Target Audience, Resources, Social Media Choice; (3) Check: Monitoring; (4) Act: Activity Plan. Figure 3 illustrates this division.
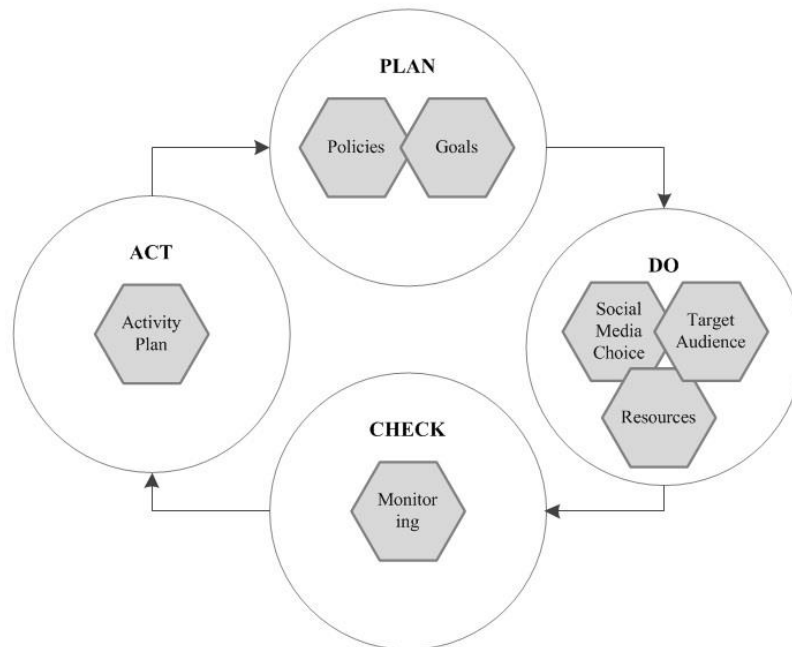
Figure 3: SMS7 meets PDCA

During the first Plan stage, the policies and goals for the specific social media strategy are set. Afterwards, the initial plans for the social media operations are primarily executed in the Do stage, with choosing a social media platform, defining the right target audience and allocating the required resources to this task. Afterwards, in the Check phase, the companies monitor their activities on the social media sites and, thereby, measure their acceptance. In the Act stage, the gained insights are then adapted and the findings transformed into an activity plan for the companies' social media operations. The continuous repetition of the cycle can, therefore, lead to a steady improvement of the elements. An in-depth explanation of each SMS7 element will be provided in chapter 3.4.

Other frameworks

Although various sources include the aforementioned elements of a social media strategy, there are only a limited amount of authors that integrate entire theoretical frameworks into their articles for the purpose of deploying social media strategically.

Several authors offer step-by-step concepts to implement social media in organizations. The first article that proposes an eight-step model to design a strategy is written by Rodriguez-Donaire (2012). First, the definition of the right online audience takes place. Next,

the company needs to determine the internet position that conforms to the targeted users. Afterwards, the online objectives are to be specified. With this information, the realistic strategy can then be planned by the responsible staff. The next step comprises the decision for the required technologies regarding the selected platforms. The most essential step is the seventh one of Rodriguez-Donaire's concept, which consists of the implementation of the social media presence. In order to constantly improve the strategy, the final step of the approach consists of measuring if the achieved outcomes match the targeted objectives.

A further step-by-step framework is developed by Othman, Bidin and Hussain (2013) and consists of 10 steps to a successful social media strategy. Their approach starts with the mapping of a social graph; therefore, a company should first define its overall purpose for the implementation of social media, such as for a professional or personal usage. Secondly, the company is supposed to listen to online conversations and simultaneously analyze the trends and opportunities available on social media. Setting measurable goals for the social media deployment is the next part of their concept. In their opinion it is also crucial to find the key influencers, since these are the ones that are more likely to encourage other users to follow specific companies or purchase certain products. The sixth element implies the task of developing a content strategy, which determines the manner of posts and online presence. Afterwards, a tactical planning is supposed to occur which leads to the creation and publishing of the content. In order to be successful in the networks, companies are then advised to engage and facilitate in conversations. Finally, measuring the success of the strategy and reviewing the social media activities is important to stay competitive and continuously improve the strategy.

Hays and colleagues (2013) offer another step-by-step guide. They refer to it as the cycle of successful social media marketing. The first step of their cycle implies the attraction of users. This might incorporate other required steps, such as the implementation of a platform and the definition of the right target audience. The following step aims to engage users' interest and motivate them to participate. This tends to be achieved through providing relevant content and constantly engaging on the social networking sites. Afterwards, the company is supposed to retain the customers and build brand loyalty. Brand loyalty can be accomplished through giving the users a feeling of belonging and caring about their individual issues. Through these newly developed relationships, the company can then fulfill the next stage and hence learn about the users' preferences. This can be done with the aid of interacting with the users but also with monitoring the conversations on the social media platforms. The final step of their

strategy is to provide the users with relevant and customized information. This final step differs from other frameworks, for they aim to provide the online audience with customized information earlier in the strategy in order to engage them in their social media presence in the first place. However, after the measurements and monitoring took place a company is likely to have a greater knowledge about their consumers and can thus create more precise content.

Another option is the concept of See-Pui Ng and Chung Wang (2013). They suggest that a social media strategy starts with a social media action plan. Clear business objectives need to then be defined, which should overall aim to increase the business value. The next step includes the outlining of specific policies for the social media usage that determines or restricts the freedom of action for employees. Afterwards, a company is supposed to define its desired target audience. Next, the required resources for this project are to be determined. Their approach ends with the setting of predefined metrics for measuring the social media impacts (See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). This approach resembles the elements of the SMS7 framework the most.

One can find several similarities among these approaches. The following table depicts the mentioning of the social media strategy framework elements divided by authors.

Table 2 Overview Frameworks by Authors and SMS Elements

Authors	Resources	Policies	Goals	Target Audience	Social Media Choice	Activity Plan	Monitoring
Rodriguez-Donaire (2012)	x		x	x	x		x
Othman, et al. (2013)			x			x	x
Hays et al. (2013)				x	x		x
See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang (2013)	x	x	x	x		x	x

All of the above described step-by-step frameworks conclude with a measurement of the companies' impacts for constant improvement. Three of these concepts also have the setting of clear objectives in common. Furthermore, a focus on regular interaction with the targeted audience is shared by these concepts. The setting of clear policies, however, is only mentioned by See-Pui Ng and Chung Wang (2013).

Another view on a social media strategy is provided by the following authors, which all propose differing sub categorizations of strategies that companies can select from for deploying social media.

Currant, O'Hara and O'Brian (2011) find four strategies essential when engaging in social media platforms, namely the direct, indirect, internal and inbound signalling strategy. The direct strategy implies that a company utilizes social media platforms to advertise and promote their offerings. The indirect strategy on the other hand is about employees engaging in conversations with customers and, thus, building relationships with their audience. The internal usage of social media is suggested to guide the internal communication in a company and, hence, use social networks for knowledge sharing and information exchange among employees. The inbound signalling strategy by Currant et al. (2011) is similar to a pure monitoring strategy; hence, the company makes no active use of social media but still aims to gain benefits from it. It implies that organizations use social media platforms to monitor the brand value with the aid of monitoring tools. These are supposed to track brand mentions and trending topics among the target audience (Currant, O'Hara and O'Brian, 2011).

Munar (2012) further suggests three different strategic approaches to social media, namely the mimetic strategy, the advertising strategy and the analytic strategy that were investigated in the tourism sector. The mimetic strategy implies that a company basically copies the style and online culture of another social network site and applies it to their corporate site. In this way a company saves the time and efforts to create their own approach and almost benchmarks their social media strategy. With the advertising strategy, social media are essentially seen as pure marketing channels through which the customers are approached with offerings and promotions. This represents the most common approach in the industry (Munar, 2012). The analytic strategy suggests a second-hand utilization of social media. This implies that user generated content data, which is already available on the web, is used for monitoring and research purposes. Thereby, no internal social media presence is required, only the access to the present information is to be established.

The usage of social media for different strategic purposes is outlined by Constantinides et al., (2008) and distinguishes between the active and passive utilization of the web 2.0. The passive way is achieved through listening to the customers and monitoring the activities of users on social platforms. For this purpose, companies do not require a social media presence, but investing in monitoring tools for the passive usage is advisable. Companies that utilize social media as a marketing tool are engaging in the active way of operating social media. A company can, thus, decide which approaches they want to take with social media and adopt resources and expertise accordingly. A combination of both usages is certainly possible as well.

Wilson et al. (2011) proposes four different types of social media strategies. The first type is called the 'predictive practioner'. This type tends to be rather pragmatic in the use of social media and uses the given platforms for only one specific area that is easily measurable, e.g. customer service. Next, the 'creative experimenter' focuses mainly on listening to the customers' voice on social media platforms in order to improve certain functions of their business with taking the feedback into account. The 'social media champion' uses the online platforms for large initiatives, e.g. marketing initiatives, which might require collaboration across various functions and include external parties. Lastly, the 'social media transformer' engages in large-scale interaction on social media platforms that also include external stakeholders of the organization. These four strategies are described as temporal, hence organizations tend to progress from one to the other over time, depending on the efforts and resources they employ. Companies are supposed to select the type of strategies according to their overall organizational culture and the targeted objectives they might have for social media.

These sub categorizations show that there are two dominating streams of strategies. It can be roughly differentiated between a social media usage for investigating consumer behavior and, hence, solely monitoring the ongoing activities for market research, and a social media usage for actively marketing the company and advertising its offerings to a wide online audience. Table 3 summarizes the various strategies and provides a short explanation of their aim.

Table 3 Overview Frameworks by Authors with Explanation

Authors	Strategies and Explanations
Currant, O'Hara & O'Brian (2012)	*1. Direct* = Advertising/Marketing *2. Indirect* = Interaction/CRM *3. Internal* = Internal communication; *4. Inbound signaling* = Market research
Munar (2012)	*1. Mimetic* = Benchmark; *2. Advertising* = Marketing; *3. Analytic* = Market research
Constantinides et al. (2008)	*1. Active* = Advertising/Marketing; *2. Passive* = Market research
Wilson et al. (2011)	*1. Predictive Practioner* = CRM; *2. Creative experimenter* = Market research; *3. Social media champion* = Advertising/Marketing; *4. Social media transformer* = Interaction/Networking

In addition, an often cited part of the social media strategy literature is contributed by Kietzmann et al. (2011) with establishing the honeycomb of social media framework, which represents a guidance of how to best deploy social media in a company. The seven functional building blocks that are part of this honeycomb are identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups (Kietzmann et al., 2011), and describe the possible differences in an individual user's experience and utilization of social media. An explanation

of the meaning of each block is provided hereafter. Identity represents the extent a user wants to disclose about him- or herself. Conversation shows the degree of willingness to communicate with other users and, thus, interact. Sharing depicts what kind of content a user wants to exchange with others. The framework presence provides information about the users' availability and simultaneously illustrates their location. The relationship block shows the degree of bondage and the type of relation a user might have with the network. Reputation represents how users classify themselves regarding other users on the social platforms. Finally, group describes the possibility of users to form communities in their social media networks. The authors further provide an outline for developing social media strategies with the 4 C's model, which integrates the actions cognize, congruity, curate and chase (Kietzmann et al., 2011). According to this, a company is first supposed to recognize its position within the abovementioned honeycomb framework for developing strategies that are consistent with the firm's overall goals and the social media functionalities. Afterwards, a company should determine which resources and employees they allocate to this division and define in what way those maintain the social media sites. Finally, a permanent scan of the social media environment to gather relevant and trending information ensures continuous learning and improvements in this area.

Moreover, Parent, Plangger and Bal (2011) propose a framework that aims to support the customer engagement on social networks; namely the six C model. It starts with the first two C's as in the company and the content. These first keywords define the platforms a company wants to utilize for its online presence as well as the importance of the accurate selection of subjects to post on these social networks. Further, it determines the kind of content posted, such as videos or text posts. The next C presents the control element, hence, monitoring the sites and setting usage policies is crucial. Afterwards, the focus is on community. The people in a community are helpful in spreading the word and, thus, creating an online buzz. The next element of their framework is the customer. For creating value with social media it is essential to target the right audience and acknowledge the consumers' needs. The final C of their framework stands for conversations. Engaging in conversations as mentioned before is key to a successful social media presence.

A further option of a social media strategy is one divided into four dimensions by Meijer and Thaens (2013). The first dimension is the technological choice regarding social media. This implies the decision for platforms and devices used by the employees. Secondly, social media needs to be coupled to a set of organizational tasks. An alignment between the new online

jobs and the current tasks is advised for a successful implementation. The third dimension consists of identifying the objectives that a company thrives to attain with the usage of social media. The final dimension implies the arrangement of tasks and responsibilities throughout the organization for an effective social media management and usage. This might relate to the definition of usage policies, which guide the employees in approaching the social media. Meijer and Thaens (2013), moreover, provide three different strategic perspectives on social media. They distinguish between the push, pull and networking strategy. A push strategy implies the usage of social media to broadcast information. The pull strategy uses social media as a channel to gather input from the customers. Lastly, the networking strategy defines the usage of social media for interaction with the followers.

The following table presents the abovementioned strategic frameworks in a short form.

Table 4 Overview Frameworks by Authors with Explanation

Authors	Strategies and Explanations
Kietzmann et al. (2011)	*1. Cognize* = Recognize position within honeycomb framework; *2. Congruity* = Align strategy with overall business objectives *3. Curate* = Determine resources; *4. Chase* = Monitoring
Parent, Plangger and Bal (2011)	*1. Company* = Social media choice; *2. Content*; *3. Control* = Monitoring; Policies; *4. Community*; *5.Customer* = Target Audience; *6. Conversation*
Meijer & Thaens (2013)	*1. Technological choice* = Resources; *2. Couple social media with organization =* Align tasks; *3. Objectives* = Goals; *4. Arrange tasks and responsibilities/ 1. Push strategy* = Advertising/Marketing *2. Pull strategy* = Monitoring; *3. Networking strategy*

The three tables (Table 2, 3 and 4) included in this chapter show that numerous authors take similar approaches to a social media strategy in their work. Compared to the elements of the social media strategy framework by Effing (2013), a lot of key aspects recur and present the essential parts of the described framework. All of the above described frameworks include a step or subcategory that aims at monitoring the social media activities or utilizing the platforms for market research. The majority of the frameworks also share the focus of social media on advertising the offerings of a company. However, the focus on an interaction and networking with the defined target audience is named in only four of these 11 frameworks.

3.4. What are the elements of a social media strategy?

Reading the selected articles it became apparent that the elements of the SMS7 framework were dominating keywords that recurred in the sources. Furthermore, several authors used similar approaches with the goal of a successful appliance of social media strategies in organizations. The following table provides an overview of the amount of authors referring to each element of the social media strategy.

Table 5 Overview Authors and SMS7 Elements

Elements	Authors
Resources	Kietzmann et al. (2011); Chandy (2014); See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang (2013); Chandy (2014); Linke & Zerfass, (2013); Parent et al. (2011); Jansen et al. (2009); Constantinides et al. (2008); Carim & Warwick (2013); Malthouse et al. (2013); Munar (2012); Hotopp & Willecke (2010); Berthon et al. (2012); Picazo-Vela et al. (2012); Hsu (2012); Dutta (2010); Meijer & Thaens (2013); Andzulis et al. (2012); Bottles & Sherlock (2011); Guinan et al. (2014); Klaus & Nguyen (2013); Arvidsson & Holmström (2013)
Policies	Palmer (2013); See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang (2013); Meijer & Thaens (2013); Vaast & Kaganer (2013); Thackeray et al. (2012); Constantinides et al. (2008); Weber (2013); Midyette et al. (2014); DiStaso & McCorkindale (2013); Gotterbarn (2012); Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2014); Dunn (2010); Burkhalter et al. (2014); Berthon et al. (2012)
Goals	Rodriguez-Donaire (2012); Bottles & Sherlock (2011); Barnes (2014); Meijer & Thaens (2013); Othman et al. (2013); Andzulis et al. (2012); Palmer (2013); Kietzmann et al. (2011); Arvidsson & Holmström (2013); Hotopp & Willecke, (2010); Gotterbarn (2012); Palmieri (2012); Woodcock et al. (2011); Drulă (2010); Larson & Watson (2011); See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang (2013); Ferrell & Ferrell (2012); Malthouse et al. (2013); Shen & Bissell (2013); Midyette et al. (2014); Heath et al. (2013); Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson (2013); Thackeray et al. (2012); Piskorski (2011); Sigala (2011)
Target audience	Dutta (2010); Hanna et al. (2011); Thackeray et al. (2012); See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang (2013); Rodriguez-Donaire (2012); Leeflang et al. (2014); Barnes (2014) ; Hsu (2012); Bottles & Sherlock (2011); Chandy (2014); Ferrell & Ferrell (2012); Kang et al. (2014); Salo et al. (2013)
Social media choice	Hsu (2012); DiStaso & McCorkindale (2013); Hanna et al. (2011); Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo (2013); Parent et al. (2011); Hotopp & Willecke (2010); Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Midyette et al. (2014); Devillers (2013); Barnes (2014); Bottles & Sherlock (2011); Dutta (2010); Woodcock et al. (2011); Ferrell & Ferrell (2012); Palmieri (2012); Drulă (2010); Grensing-Pophal (2012); Lehmkuhl et al. (2013); Hvass & Munar (2012); Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010); Shen & Bissell (2013); Burkhalter et al. (2014); Jansen et al. (2009); Hays et al (2013); Dunn (2010); Berthon et al. (2012)
Activity Plan	Barnes (2014); Midyette et al. (2014); Mergel & Bretschneider (2013); Goldner (2013); Shen & Bissell (2013); Hsu (2012); See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang (2013); Berthon et al. (2012); Hays et al (2013); Lillquivst & Louhiala-Salminen (2014); Mills (2012)
Monitoring	Goldner (2013); Curran et al. (2011); Woodcock et al. (2011); Dutta (2010); Constantinides et al. (2008); Jansen et al. (2009); Hays et al (2013); Leeflang et al. (2014); Barnes (2014); Mortleman (2011) ; Bottles & Sherlock (2011); Drulă (2010); Picazo-Vela et al. (2012); Sigala (2011); He et al. (2013); Larson & Watson (2011) ; Lehmkuhl et al. (2013); Woodcock et al. (2011); Salo et al. (2013); Hsu (2012); Andzulis et al. (2012); Heath et al. (2013)

Table 5 shows that the SMS7 elements are considered by numerous articles of the reviewed sources and, hence, the authors widely integrate these strategic elements into their work.

The following table, table 6, provides a first overview of all below mentioned elements and a short description of their purpose. This overview highlights the difference between the elements and summarizes their main characteristics and aims.

Table 6 Summary SMS7 elements and their meaning

Elements	Description
Resources	Defining resources includes employees and technology. Offer training, divide tasks and internally develop the required expertise.
Policies	Policies aim to minimize risks. Set the amount and manner of information disclosure. Determine the employees' usage of social media.
Goals	Set objectives for corporate social media usage. Goals differ widely; increase brand awareness/firm performance, network with other industry members, conduct market research. Align goals for social media with overall business goals.
Target audience	Define the target audience of the social media activities. Determinants are demographics of customers and their preferred location. Target B2B and/or B2C.
Social media choice	Decision for appropriate social media platform. Select based on target audience presence and purpose of social media operations. Most popular: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (etc.)
Activity Plan	Creation of a schedule for corporate posts. Determines the style, frequency and type of the online activities.
Monitoring	Monitoring the social media activities for measuring the success of social media presence and gaining insights into customers' online behavior and preferences. Decreases likeliness of reputational damage. Numerous tools available.

The following section will incorporate an in-depth summary and evaluation of the parts of the social media strategy framework as described in the academic literature.

Resources

The first part of a social media strategy is determined by the literature as the allocation of relevant resources.

For a successful social media strategy it is important to determine which resources and employees are allocated to this task (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Chandy, 2014; See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). Resources include the financial part, namely the budget for implementing such a strategy with all related technological expenses, as well as the allocation of the dedicated time and staff (Chandy, 2014; Linke & Zerfass, 2013; Parent, Plangger & Bal, 2011). Social media are always present and accessible regardless of office hours; which indicates the importance of having a team of people monitor the websites around-the-clock. Hence, continuous engagement of this team is mandatory (Parent, Plangger & Bal, 2011; Jansen et al., 2009). Moreover, a willingness to invest in required resources is an essential precondition for being successful on these platforms (Constantinides, Lorenzo-Romero & Gomez Boria, 2008). The literature, however, does not provide a description as to the amount of financial means that should be allocated to this department.

Several authors agree that in order to successfully deploy social media, the companies need to provide specific training for the employees allocated to this task (Carim & Warwick, 2013; Malthouse et al., 2013; Munar, 2012; Hotopp & Willecke, 2010; Berthon et al., 2012; Picazo-

Vela et al., 2012; Linke & Zerfass, 2013). With the training the employees are taught to become familiar with the networks, its opportunities and usage terms. This is required since the employees need to have the competencies and expertise to be the creators of relevant content that preferably appeal to a large group of people while simultaneously act as the representatives of the company. After all, employees are seen as the key factor for social media success (Malthouse et al., 2013; Hsu, 2012). The training should also focus on enhancing their communication skills (Berthon et al., 2012) for securing interesting and respectful interactions with customers. Although, the employees need to be well educated to execute the management of social media in favor of the company, they still need to have freedom in what they are precisely doing (Malthouse et al., 2013). The management of social media is supposed to be an appropriate balance of exercising the acquired knowledge and sensing what behavior is best suited in the particular situation.

Internally developing this expertise and managing social media effectively in a company is a task that is often underestimated (Munar, 2012). Due to the lacking knowledge and experiences, companies often thrive for social media assistance. However, the management of social media is definitely not a job that can be outsourced (Dutta, 2010). Since these media are also used as a communication channel next to serving as promotional platforms, the firm should utilize its own voice to interact with its customers. Authenticity in the content posted on social media platforms is crucial for being successful in that area, and only the company itself can deliver their messages genuinely (Dutta, 2010).

Furthermore, it is important to define specific tasks properly among the staff, so that each employee plays a certain role in maintaining the social media sites (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Meijer & Thaens, 2013). If there is a clear job description, the blurry field of social media becomes more specific and eliminates possible ambiguities. The human resources need to, moreover, be committed to the task and motivated to interact in order to foster engagement and collaboration with the users (Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012; Bottles & Sherlock, 2011). The posts need to attract the attention of the customers and, therefore, enthusiasm among the employees is likely to reflect on their writing style.

It is also beneficial for companies to engage younger employees for this division for they are eager to work on social media, since they use the same networks in their private life, and are able to demonstrate the potential of these modern technologies to more experienced co-workers (Guinan, Parise & Rollag, 2014). This might lead to an integration of social media in various departments. Nevertheless, when executives realize the gain from deploying social

media, the overall organizational culture is likely to adjust to the open-minded and increasingly collaborative environment that tends to drive business success (Guinan, Parise & Rollag, 2014; Linke & Zerfass, 2013). Thus, social media is best suited with different demographics of the human resources in a firm in order to achieve the desirable outcomes. In any case, it is essential that the employees, who administer the sites, are also the ones responsible for the development of the firm's social media strategy (Carim & Warwick, 2013). The people that operate these networks on a daily basis for organizational purposes are in turn the ones that are best able to identify the necessary elements of a strategic plan for its execution. Employees who "live and breathe" social media, are found to be advantageous in order to create value with these interactive websites (Malthouse et al., 2013).

The allocation of the specific information technology represents another part of the required resources for a social media strategy (Linke & Zerfass, 2013; Arvidsson & Holmström, 2013; Klaus & Nguyen, 2013). A constant adoption of novelties alongside severe investments in obtaining technical devices are essential (Hottop & Willecke, 2010) due to the rapidly changing trends in this area as well as continuous technological advancements. Hottop and Willecke (2010) further propose that modern devices similarly enhance the motivation of employees to work on social media.

Policies

Social media strategy as defined in the literature is moreover depicted by the use of policies that are predominantly directed at the employees.

As mentioned before, usage policies are constructed to minimize the risk related to social media (Palmer, 2013; See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Vaast & Kaganer, 2013). Appropriate use of social media should furthermore be ensured by these policies (Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2012). These policies intend to provide guidelines for employees' usage of social media (Constantinides, Lorenzo-Romero & Gomez Boria, 2008; Weber, 2013) by directing them in what they can and cannot do on the web sites in the organizational context (Vaast & Kaganer, 2013). Anticipating that questions might arise among the staff about proper behavior, a written document including the main points to consider while interacting with customers can prevent misguided situations. Social media policies constitute the outline for developing and sharing information and should be present in any organization operating interactive websites (Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014; DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013). Simultaneously enabling and restricting employees' social media behavior is what best describes the purpose of social media policies (Weber, 2013).

Social media policies often address ethical issues (Gotterbarn, 2012). Employees should not only take the companies' competitive advantage into account by filling social media sites with content, but also think about their ethical responsibility for their behavior. This does not differ from the responsibilities a companies has beyond social media, which is why these policies tend to rely on the common rules and regulations valid for the entire organization (Vaast & Kaganer, 2013).

With social media policies, companies moreover determine to what extent they want to disclose information (Burkhalter, Wood & Tryce, 2014). Employees need to be reminded that it is neither beneficial to release too much information to the wide public nor to be too cautious with publishing necessary disclosures.

In several cases, companies forbid employees to use social media platforms during their work, which is seen as counterproductive, since they are otherwise told to use these networks for organizational purposes (Berthon et al., 2012; Constantinides, Lorenzo-Romero & Gomez Boria, 2008). If firms ban them from visiting these sites, the employees develop a reluctant relationship with social media that does not lead to the intended commitment. This shows that the deployment of usage policies is necessary (Berthon et al., 2012) in order to guide the employees in the right social media behavior while simultaneously restricting their personal use of the networks.

Policies are, additionally, important when the public can easily comment on a companies' social media page (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013). People might post offensive or unrelated information that the company does not support and thus only harms the firm if openly present on their platform. The company should therefore make clear in the beginning how employees are supposed to act if such problems occur. Thereby, social media policies also serve as a defensive function to reduce the impact of potential attacks on the Internet (Gotterbarn, 2012).

Furthermore, a policy should also include the task to edit the posts prior to publishing (Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014; Lorenzo-Romero, Alarcón-del-Amo & Constantinides, 2014; Vaast & Kaganer, 2013). Employees need to check the contents for errors regarding the orthography as well as the information of the statements in order to ensure their credibility in the network.

In the case of an organizational crisis, the social media policies might also help design statements and public communication that best solve the situation (Palmer, 2013), since you have to show presence on social media in good as well as in bad times (Dunn, 2010). Having

such a policy at a firm's disposal for the worst case scenario will save the company time in situations where fast actions are essential. Maintaining a positive social media presence illustrates a goal of developing these policies (Gotterbarn, 2012).

For departments in which social media is not yet an aspect, policies aim to define how employees might be able to integrate the sites into their work routine (Vaast & Kaganer, 2013). Thus, social media policies might reach beyond the initial department for increasing the overall networking and online operations of the firm.

However, there is also criticism as to how effective strict social media policies might in fact be (Weber, 2013). Weber (2013) acknowledges the ambivalence in these policies, since employees are told to express their individual voices while still talking in a corporate-friendly manner. This might lead to employees' insecurities about their correct online behavior. Social media policies should therefore aim to better clarify the compliance with the corporate brand in the companies' posts on various platforms (Weber, 2013).

Setting policies for the social media usage in organizations is nevertheless predominantly seen as effective for the purpose of providing guidance and support to the employees.

Goals

The next part of a social media strategy is determined by the literature as the setting of a goal for the social media presence.

For a strategy to be successful, a targeted outcome needs to be determined in order to be able to assess its effectiveness along the way. Therefore, companies that deploy social media strategies also need to determine their ideal objectives (Rodriguez-Donaire, 2012; Bottles & Sherlock, 2011; Barnes, 2014; Meijer & Thaens, 2013). These goals need to be measurable (Othman, Bidin & Hussain, 2013) so that the strategy can be evaluated and constantly adapted if necessary. The determination of these goals needs to be completed before entering in the social media business to guarantee a successful implementation (Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012).

To define the goals for utilizing social media corporately, an alignment between these objectives and the overall business goal is required (Palmer, 2013; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Arvidsson & Holmström, 2013). With having equal objectives that work towards a common purpose, it is more likely that they can be achieved and in this way full commitment of the employees can be ensured.

One specific goal with deploying social media is obviously to promote the brand (Hotopp & Willecke, 2010; Gotterbarn, 2012, Palmieri, 2012; Woodcock, Green & Starkey, 2011; Drulă, 2010) and thereby increase the firm's performance (Larson & Watson, 2011; See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). With social media it is easy to reach a large audience and, thus, with the right strategy, a brand can gain recognition around the globe fast. Barnes (2014) suggests that the strategy should lead to a successful and sustainable social media usage which is engaging for both sides involved. The usage of social media for promotional purposes is the most frequently adopted by companies (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012). Another goal of social media usage is to drive traffic to the website of the company (Palmieri, 2012; Hotopp & Willecke, 2010) in order to as well increase brand recognition and hence sales. Solely attracting potential customers with the content posted on social media should likewise be integrated into the goals of the strategy (Malthouse et al., 2013). Social media is certainly seen as a digital advertising channel (Woodcock, Green & Starkey, 2011) even though more and more authors agree that the main focus should not lie on selling products and services since this is supposed to be the job of the traditional media (Shen & Bissell; 2013). Companies tend to not be successful with only posting advertisements and product offerings for they fail to attract much attention among users. A greater focus on creating engagement and interaction is hence advisable (Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014; Shen & Bissell; 2013; Heath, Singh & Ganesh, 2013). Integrating social media into the consumption and purchase experience for customers rather than utilizing the sites as pure marketing channels is found to be advantageous for the companies (Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013).

Providing the audience with relevant company related information is another objective for operating social media (Palmieri, 2012; Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014). Informing about a firm's specific capabilities or job vacancies are examples of contents posted on social media (Palmieri, 2012).

A further objective many organizations have with deploying social media is on the one hand to encourage the audience to talk about the company (i.e. word-of-mouth or WOM) and on the other hand to monitor these conversations for their own purposes (Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2012; Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012). With a social media presence, companies are literally present among millions of users of the most popular platforms and can, hence, influence the brand awareness and provide content for discussions. Collecting the thoughts and advice from consumers on social media thanks to their publicly available WOM presents valuable data for

evaluating the acceptance among users and guiding possible product or service improvements (Shen & Bissell; 2013).

Another goal might be to develop a network of people that simplifies the process of spreading relevant information (Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014). In other words building a community with a social media presence represents an additional approach to these platforms (Shen & Bissell; 2013; Larson & Watson, 2011). Companies that deploy social strategies for social media, hence, strategies that help or enhance relationships among users, are found to be more successful in this area (Piskorski, 2011). These communities might be helpful for the company in terms of receiving feedback and valuable insights from customers (Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2012). Another positive consequence of a community is that brand loyalty tends to be strengthened among the members (Shen & Bissell; 2013), which in turn is likely to increase the brand equity.

Building a network with other industry members is a further possible objective (Palmieri, 2012). This relates to the possibility of targeting beyond the customer base, namely approaching distributors or suppliers as mentioned above. This network among business partners might simplify their communication processes and secure a lasting cooperation.

Social media is likewise used for market research purposes (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012). Due to the high user numbers, a representative outcome is more easily generated. In some cases even a co-creation with customers might be started through social media (Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2012; Sigala, 2011). For companies with the purpose of finding inspirational followers that are willing to engage in a creative cooperation social media presents a great opportunity pool.

Regardless which goal a company eventually decides to attain for successfully integrating social media into their work routine, it needs to be defined for a social media strategy to be complete and effective.

Target audience
A further step in defining a social media strategy was found to be the definition of a clear target audience.

For a successful social media presence, it is moreover essential to define your target audience in your social media strategy (Dutta, 2010; Hanna et al., 2011; Rodriguez-Donaire, 2012; See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013; Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2012; Bottles & Sherlock, 2011). Gaining a significant reach and attracting enough attention among the selected target audience

is the fundament for creating value with social media (Leeflang et al., 2014; Hsu, 2012), because without an audience, your posts become irrelevant. In order to select the right platforms to utilize for having a social media presence, it is first crucial to identify the desired targets. Afterwards, the question is asked, on which platforms these targets can be found (Barnes, 2014). These actions then open up the opportunity for companies to communicate with their customers and fans.

The determination of the right audience can either be the result of an internal consideration about which group is most likely to purchase the certain products or services a company offers, or might also be the outcome of an in-depth research process (Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2012). Organizations that are uncertain about who to target tend to get a more precise answer after a careful investigation.

Characteristics that need to be configured to identify the right audience are the demographics as well as the intentions for the web presence. The first determination of a target is whether the social media presence should approach a private or public audience (Dutta, 2010). The private audience might include not only friends and family but also colleagues, for which a usage of professional networking sites such as LinkedIn might be chosen. The public audience is of course the more frequently targeted by organizations, and can be defined as the entire industry and all potential global customers (Dutta, 2010). For this option, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are the preferred choice.

The age of the potential customers is another factor composing a clear definition of the target audience. Whereas younger targets can be found on almost every existing platform, since it is closer to their natural habit by being born in the age of the Internet, targeting elderly people might appear as a challenge for companies. Leeflang and colleagues (2014) suggest that older customers can be best reached through an integration of digital and traditional media. For instance, broadcasting television commercials with references to offerings of events taking place in the World Wide Web might have a stronger effect on this age group than solely posting content in e.g. a tweet on Twitter.

Next, a company should determine what group of people they want to reach. Social media is primarily used for approaching customers, but a reason to be present might also be to interact with suppliers or vendors of the firm (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012). The usage of social media for appealing to suppliers or communicating with current distributors obviously differs from the

usage for marketing purposes to end-consumers. Thus, a clear definition of targets can help the company in determining what content to publish or how to approach the audience.

Targeting a whole community is a further option for companies planning on operating a successful social media presence (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012; Salo, Lankinen & Mäntymäki, 2013). Virtual communities tend to grow steadily, and having people share the same interests and preferences in a group might simplify the process of simultaneously reaching a greater amount of potential customer. However, the choice to target a community is found to be the least common among organizations (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012).

Another option for a target audience is to reach out and try to address the key opinion leaders on social media platforms (Chandy, 2014; Leeflang et al., 2014). Approaching only a smaller amount of people, but reaching the ones relevant for the specific platforms might be beneficial for success on social media. Chandy (2014) proposes that with targeting the influencers, companies are more likely to gain greater brand awareness on the platforms for they tend to promote products of their preferred choice and also have the power to lead other users to purchase them. Thus, targeting the active participants on social media is more helpful in improving the degree of the brand's popularity rather than including the passive users (Kang, Tang & Fiore, 2014). These active users could become brand advocates (Leeflang et al., 2014) and serve the company with blog posts or review videos about the specific product and in that way create a buzz on the internet.

In order to simplify the process of defining and locating the right target audience, it might be helpful to integrate and navigate different platforms at a time (Hanna et al., 2011). Thereby, users who operate multiple social media sites are more easily found and the integration can also result in an increasing diversity of possible audiences.

When the target is clearly defined, it is important to not disregard to tailor the messages posted in order to appeal to this audience (Barnes, 2014). Naturally, if users follow a company on social media they might be interested in the organization or their actions; however, neither a purchase nor positive word-of-mouth is promised. The next step is to approach the prior defined and gained audience in a way that further captures their interest beyond only a limited time. This relates to the part of content, which will be further elaborated below.

Social media choice
Having defined the target audience, the next step in a social media strategy is to choose the appropriate social media platform.

First an overview of the existing platforms is provided. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are regularly named the most popular social media sites (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2013; Hanna et al, 2011; Parent, Planger & Bal, 2011), with Facebook being the world's dominating platform by the number of users (Hsu, 2012). These main platforms provide different possibilities for the organizations. For instance, companies mainly share text posts or pictures on Facebook and Twitter with their followers, whereas YouTube is utilized for sharing videos with the audience. Other examples of existing platforms are the photo-sharing site Instagram, the professional networking platform LinkedIn and Google+, which is a further networking page.

A careful choice of the right platform is an essential part of a social media strategy (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014; Devillers, 2013). In order to be successful in this area, the company needs to be compatible with the selected platform (Hottop & Willecke, 2010). For selecting the optimal platform, it is moreover important to consider on which platform the target audience is and thus make a decision based on the platforms' prevalent demographics (Barnes, 2014). Selecting a social media platform is hence not only a decision based on the companies' internal preferences and available technologies, but also an outcome of researching the likeliness of the target group to be present on the specific platforms.

Local preferences also need to be taken into account while choosing the right platform (Bottles & Sherlock, 2011). Some social media sites are only locally available or popular, whereas others are globally successful. The social media platforms dominating in a country often depend on the available technology, cultural and in some cases even governmental issues (Berthon et al., 2012). For example, the attempt to engage customers through Facebook in China, where the usage of this site is prohibited, is a waste of corporate time and money. Therefore, the chosen platform should suit the company's location in order to reach a wide audience (Dutta, 2010).

Concerning the correct choice for a platform, companies can select a site based on the main purposes and objectives they aim to pursue with social media, since the platforms do differ in their various possibilities. Firstly, Facebook is predominantly used for advertising and product promotions (Hvass & Munar, 2012; Woodcock, Green & Starkey, 2011; Shen & Bissell, 2013). With this social networking site being the biggest in terms of user numbers, companies are likely to gain the highest online exposure possible through Facebook. Interaction with customers is furthermore suggested to be greater on Facebook than on other networks (Hays,

Page & Buhalis, 2013), due to the numerous options to comment on posts, to write private messages and also have the possibility to post content on the corporate Facebook page. Therefore, it is an advantageous platform to build and maintain relationships with customers and thus utilize Facebook for handling CRM. With Facebook's available application to ask the online community questions through the tool including a kind of user voting companies can, moreover, use the platform for investigating trends and preferences.

Twitter is the most prominent microblogging service where users can post their individual updates, which are referred to as tweets, to an audience (Jansen et al., 2009). On Twitter companies focus on engaging in social activities and providing followers with interesting facts (Hvass & Munar, 2012). Due to the limited number of characters, comprehensive advertisements are condensed or replaced by alternative information that aims to arouse the interest of customers.

The abovementioned platforms also present a suitable location for internal organizational communication. If CEO's or managers want to encourage their employees or provide them with feedback, this can easily be done via Facebook or Twitter (Dunn, 2010).

If the usage of social media is mainly adopted for recruitment purposes, it is advisable to operate LinkedIn (Palmieri, 2012; Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012). On this platform, the focus is on the presentation of the educational background of users and their prior professional experiences.

Advertising through YouTube is certainly another popular possibility (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012; Parent, Planger & Bal, 2011). However, companies require the expertise and creativity to produce valuable videos or short films in order to capitalize on this platform. Moreover, videos are considered as only a single part of an integrated marketing plan; therefore, the process of strategically fitting the video into the overall communication approach of the company based on the users' needs is critical (Grensing-Pophal, 2012).

Lehmkuhl and colleagues (2013) argue that it is crucial to have a proper web presence on different social media platforms. Hence, it is advisable to integrate various sites and operate an entire social media infrastructure (Lehmkuhl, Baumöl & Jung, 2013; Drulă, 2010). Another recommendation for companies is to have an ecosystem view on social media, in which various platforms are seen as related elements rather than stand-alone networks (Hanna et al., 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). In this way, a navigation and integration of the different platforms is proposed to simplify the definition of the company's target and the

location of this target as well as the content that the company wants to present and how it will be distributed throughout the ecosystem. For instance, connecting the platforms by integrating the videos a company uploaded on YouTube in a Facebook post or hinting at the social media presence on traditional media through e.g. television commercials.

Activity Plan

A further section of a social media strategy was found to be the determination of a clear activity plan.

An action plan for a social media strategy can imply the creation of a schedule for corporate posts (Barnes, 2014; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013; Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014). This schedule might include information about the organizations' social media activity concerning the specific time of the day, the frequency and the subject of the post. The regularity of the postings is important for finding a right balance (Shen & Bissell, 2013). The latest news in case something occurred should be posted directly and thus randomly; however, informing customers about promotions or sales activities should first be considered and administered in their frequency. Companies should nevertheless post regularly on an ongoing-basis, since the platforms move at such a rapid pace that it is easy to lose the connection (Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014) and creating the desired brand awareness takes time and effort (Mills, 2012). Action plans also determine the possibility of posting content on weekdays and weekends.

Barnes (2014) emphasizes the importance of operating social media networks differently every day in order to attract the users. With variety in the posts, followers are more likely to stay interested. Similar recurring posts, especially advertising, might rapidly be considered as spam and thus be disregarded by the audience.

The action plan might further integrate a framework for responding to followers or interacting with fans (See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). A time frame for responses might simplify the task to react to users' requests and thereby helps a firm in clearly dividing the time and actions of the responsible employees.

The style of the posts is equally important as their frequency (Barnes, 2014). They way customers are approached should be defined in the action plan. Responding to customer questions a company should decide if they approach them in for example a personal or a more formal language. The responsible employees should moreover be polite towards followers in their approach in order to uphold their social acceptability (Lillquivst & Louhiala-Salminen,

2014). The language and attitude are an important factor for success on social media; therefore, the focus of the responsible employees should be rather on listening and learning from the community, than on preaching (Berthon et al., 2012). Furthermore, the usage of network specific features should also be adopted by the companies (Barnes, 2014). For instance, if responding to people on Twitter the company should include the @ sign and the specific account name in order to make the post direct. Hashtags can also be used for keywords in posts in order to group the responses and to simplify the monitoring process.

The action plan for a social media strategy should also comprise the type of posts. This stands in relation to the content of the posts. For sales related posts including the link to the corporate website might be useful (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013; See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013). In order to foster engagement, posting questions on the platforms is likely to create awareness and a sense of membership among users (Hsu, 2012; Shen & Bissell, 2013). The questions tend to support the interaction on the social networking site. However, it is found that companies still do not use the full potential of the platforms (Shen & Bissell, 2013). Organizations tend to post more open-ended questions rather than interactive ones (Shen & Bissell, 2013), which should in fact be their focus on websites with the aim of networking. Hence, there is a greater capability for a dialogue between the two sides that is yet to be achieved.

The activity plan might moreover list the applications a company might use on social media platforms; for instance, the numerous Facebook functionalities such as the 'Ask question' tool in order to research preferences and feelings (See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013).

There are also social media publishing tools available for the development of an activity plan (Goldner, 2013). These applications, for example HooteSuite, simplify the process of integrating several platforms, scheduling posts across networks and managing the interaction with customers (Goldner, 2013). Purchasing these tools might be appropriate for companies that lack the technological knowledge in this area.

Monitoring
The next important part of a social media strategy determined by the selected sources is the monitoring of ongoing activities and voice from the customers.

The academic literature agrees on the importance of monitoring the social media activities for a successful social media strategy (Kietzmann et al., 2011; He, Zha & Li, 2013; Heath, Singh & Ganesh, 2013; Lehmkuhl, Baumöl & Jung, 2013; Salo, Lankinen & Mäntymäki, 2013;

Hsu, 2012; Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012; Jansen et al., 2009; Woodcock, Green & Starkey, 2011; Drulă, 2010). The outcome of monitoring social media platforms, namely the vast quantities of data, is considered equally as beneficial as a thorough marketing research (Malthouse et al., 2013). Companies that fail to carefully monitor their social media channels lose a significant amount of valuable insights into the market. Therefore, clearly monitoring the buzz is important for companies operating social media platforms for it can lead to a better understanding of the consumer behavior and feelings of the mood in the market (Woodcock, Green & Starkey, 2011). The outcome of the monitoring process can moreover aid in the creation of customized offerings for the users (Lehmkuhl, Baumöl & Jung, 2013). With sufficient information about the potential customer, a company is able to adapt their advertisements to the individual needs and therewith increase the likeliness of attracting the followers' attention.

Organizations that decide to deploy social media certainly focus on monitoring the conversations and information exchange among the users (Woodcock, Green & Starkey, 2011; He, Zha & Li, 2013; Larson & Watson, 2011). The purpose of giving consideration to the customers' voice is valuable in terms of external feedback and might bring the company free product reviews (Larson & Watson, 2011). Thus, mining their conversations is essential (He, Zha & Li, 2013).

There are different purposes identified regarding the monitoring process. One reason is to analyze the social media behavior of competitors, and thus benchmarking (He, Zha & Li, 2013). Observing the competitors activities and the acceptance of their social media presence can be useful for evaluating the own presence and developing future strategies. It is also crucial for understanding customers and their networking behavior (Picazo-Vela, Gutiérrez-Martinez & Luna-Reyes, 2012; Sigala, 2011). Knowing the customers' habits on these platforms, firms are more likely to recognize how to appeal to them. Companies can also learn from monitoring their actions in order to improve their effectiveness (Dutta, 2010; Malthouse et al., 2013). After an analysis the company can see which types of posts have the highest acceptance, which together with the trend in user numbers can provide insight about the best practices. Therewith the company can adapt changes to the strategy with considering the actions that have proven to be successful before.

Monitoring is, furthermore, important in order to decrease the likeliness of reputational damage (Mortleman, 2011; Drulă, 2010). If there are considerable complaints about a firm, the processes of sharing or retweeting by users might quickly escalate and turn a small issue

into a worldwide organizational crisis. Therefore, the constant monitoring of conversations that discuss the organization is crucial in order to minimize the potential negative backlash (Mortleman, 2011) and opens the possibility to intervene in conversations if appropriate (Jansen et al., 2009). Since a substantial amount of posts directed at a firm are found to be of negative nature (Jansen et al., 2009) constantly monitoring is essential to be able to take action and try to solve potential problems. It is not only necessary to monitor the posts directed at the specific firm, but also to listen to what is being said about the company anywhere on the social media platforms beyond the firms' social media channel (Bottles & Sherlock, 2011). Users might complain about a problem or a malpractice of the company on sites other than the companies' corporate site, which the company should attempt to likewise take into account. With continuous monitoring the negative comments can directly be addressed and companies can thus respond to complaints in order to maintain the brand health (Leeflang et al., 2014; Barnes, 2014).

Measuring the success of a social media strategy can more specifically occur through monitoring the amount of likes, posts or retweets on companies' social media sites (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). These numbers can give a company a decent overview of the value of their activities. Comparing these numbers with the ones of their competitors might present an assessable overall standard.

The process of monitoring can be done with the aid of available monitoring tools (Constantinides, Lorenzo-Romero & Gomez Boria, 2008; Jansen et al., 2009). These tools can guide a firm to better understand their acceptance among the users and the effectiveness of their actions. These social media monitoring tools serve various purposes, but primarily help in assessing the success of a network (Goldner, 2013; Dutta 2010). The tools differ in their costs, ranging from free applications to rather costly ones; however, they are definitely worth the investment. Examples of such tools include Google Alert, Buzzient, Klout and Twitalizer (Woodcock, Green & Starkey, 2011; Curran, O'Hara & O'Brien, 2011). The social media monitoring tools provide the companies with dashboards and various other visual representations about the specific social media site (Curran, O'Hara & O'Brien, 2011). In this way, the process of gaining insights into the customers' behavior and retrieve data about prevalent trends and influences is simplified for the companies. The decision for a certain tool depends on the individual actions a firm wants to pursue with the outcome (Goldner, 2013).

3.4.1 Additional elements

Next to the elements determined in the social media strategy framework (SMS7), the literature review proposes further elements that might be integrated into such a strategy, namely content and listening. Table 7 illustrates their mentions by the individual sources.

Table 7 Overview Authors and potential SMS Elements

Elements	Authors
Content	Goldner (2013); Heath et al. (2013); Malthouse et al. (2013); See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang (2013); Parent, Plangger & Bal (2011); Othman et al. (2013); Thackeray, Neiger & Keller (2011); Salo et al. (2013); Curran, O'Hara & O'Brien (2011); Midyette et al. (2014); Hanna et al., 2011); Hsu (2012)
Listening	Barnes (2014); Mortleman (2011); Thackeray et al. (2012); Othman et al. (2013); Malthouse et al. (2013); Woodcock et al. (2011); Berthon et al. (2012); Jansen et al. (2009); Constantinides et al. (2008)

The two additional elements that were found in the reviewed literature are summarized in the following table.

Table 8 Summary of additional SMS elements and their meaning

Elements	Description
Content	Determine valuable content to publish on social media sites. Content needs to be relevant, of significant quality and foster conversations.
Listening	In depth analysis of the customers' posted content. Simplifies the process of responding to users and, therefore, increases rate of interaction.

The aforementioned elements are specified in detail below.

Content

A first possible addition to the elements of a social media strategy was found to be the creation of relevant content.

Various sources point out that the content published on social media is one of the core elements of a strategy (Goldner, 2013; Heath, Singh & Ganesh, 2013; Malthouse et al., 2013; See-Pui Ng & Chung Wang, 2013; Parent, Plangger & Bal, 2011). Therefore, a special attention should be given to the creation of valuable material that is supposed to fill the social networking sites of organizations day after day. Othman and colleagues (2013) go so far and propose that companies should develop an individual content strategy for the social media presence. Hence, they suggest creating a separate plan just for the topics and issues discussed on the platforms.

The content has to have several characteristics in order to be selected for the social media platforms. Primary, the content has to be relevant (Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2011; Salo, Lankinen & Mäntymäki, 2013). The audience tends to not be interested in meaningless and insignificant facts. Companies should hence focus on keeping the content current with fresh ideas to prevent followers from losing interest (Curran, O'Hara & O'Brien, 2011). Moreover, the content needs to be important to the audience (Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2011). This relates to the determination of a specific target audience and their personal interests. A strong agreement between these two elements of a social media strategy is advantageous in order to prevent posting the right content to the wrong users or vice versa. The social media content should also be valuable and of significant quality (Midyette, Youngkin & Snow-Croft, 2014; Salo, Lankinen & Mäntymäki, 2013). Organizations that aim to advertise their offerings and build a good reputation online are supposed to shine with knowledge and worthy insights. The published content should furthermore foster conversations (Thackeray, Neiger & Keller, 2011). Therefore, it might be helpful to include questions in posts or ask the users to share their opinions, since customers are more likely to comment and interact if they are directly approached and asked about their individual experiences. These online conversations are essential to maintain or potentially increase follower numbers and keep the organization present in the online world.

If all of the abovementioned criteria are considered, the company can then decide what they aim their social media presence to stand for with weighing possible content. This evaluation starts with the determination of what story the company wants to tell (Hanna et al., 2011).

Companies should be willing to take risks with the posted subjects in order to appeal to the audience (Parent, Plangger & Bal, 2011). Filling the social media sites with topics that other companies do not dare to publish or solely stepping outside of the comfort zone might attract more users to actively follow the organization. Considering the zeitgeist on social media tends to increase the likeliness of being talked about (Parent, Plangger & Bal, 2011).

Whatever content is adequate in each situation and might fit the overall culture and web presence of an organization, the main point is that focusing on the content in a social media strategy is beneficial for the social media operations (Hsu, 2012).

Listening
Another element recurring in the reviewed articles was the act of listening to the users on social media.

Several authors agree that listening is an essential part of operating social media strategically (Barnes, 2014; Mortleman, 2011; Thackeray et al., 2012; Othman et al., 2013; Malthouse et al., 2013; Woodcock et al., 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; Jansen et al., 2009; Constantinides et al., 2008). Now listening might be considered as interchangeable with the element monitoring; however, it appears to be a little more specific. Whereas monitoring represents an organization's observation of the users' conversations and their online behavior as mentioned above, listening stands for a more in depth analysis of the customers posted content and their individual words. With listening to the customers' voice, the organizations are more likely to gain insights into their preferences and needs (Thackeray et al., 2012; Jansen et al., 2009). Thereby, valuable word-of-mouth is retrieved and companies are able to monitor brand mentions and sentiments in the market (Leeflang et al., 2014). This can then lead to an evaluation of the company's value in the social media environment. Companies are consequently also able to retain their audience as customers for their brand, since they can more easily respond and comment on the posts of users through listening to their conversations (Barnes, 2014).

Mortleman (2011) specifies listening as a part of a chain of actions, adding it to the verbs responding, conversing and learning. Hence, through first listening carefully to what the users have to say, all other actions might be achieved for the aim of building a successful interaction with customers.

The decision to add listening as a further element and to not integrate it into the monitoring element is due to the various sources that consider these as two differing tasks (Mortleman, 2011; Othman et al., 2013; Malthouse et al., 2013; Woodcock et al., 2011; Jansen et al., 2009). Therefore, it is worth discussing to integrate listening as a further critical element to the social media strategy framework.

4 CASE STUDIES

For testing and evaluating these theoretical findings from the reviewed literature, case studies were conducted. The case studies are divided into two sections, first, a questionnaire was distributed among the study participants and, secondly, an observation of their social media activities took place.

Two German airlines participated in this study, namely TUIfly and Germania. TUIfly is a Hanover based full service airline that was founded in 2007 after a merger of Hapag-Lloyd Express and Hapagfly (TUIfly, 2014). The carrier currently operates more than 30 planes and

primarily flies their passengers to holiday destinations around the Mediterranean Sea. TUIfly transports about 8 million passengers a year (TUIfly, 2014). Germania is a traditional German full service carrier that exists for already 35 years (Germania Airline, 2014). The carrier operates most of their flights in Europe and North Africa. Germania has its headquarters in Berlin and has currently 23 planes at its disposal with which they transport more than 2 million passengers annually (Germania Airline, 2014).

These two airlines were willing to provide answers to an interview questionnaire, containing open-ended questions regarding their companies' social media strategy, which will be described in part 4.1.

4.1 Questionnaire

Both airlines were contacted via the internet, through the online contact form and e-mail address available on their corporate websites. Both airlines were primarily asked to participate in a face-to-face interview, however, due to time and human resource restrictions of the carriers, merely the completion of an interview questionnaire was feasible. The interviewee of TUIfly is the social media manager of the airline, who is simultaneously the contributor of the website management of TUIfly.com. The job title of the interviewee of Germania is the assistant of online sales and marketing and works in the marketing department of Germania.

The interview questionnaire contained a total of nine questions. The questionnaire was constructed in the English and German language for convenience and comprehensibility reasons. The layout of the questionnaire leads from broad questions to more specific ones. The first two questions are asked without prior hints about possible elements of a social media strategy. The next seven questions offer more details about the approaches to a social media strategy found during the literature research and are aligned with the SMS7 framework by Effing (2013). The exact questions can be seen in table 9.

Table 9 Case Study Questionnaire

Questions: Interview Questionnaire
1. What is in your opinion your company's social media strategy?
2. How do you create social media strategies? Describe the development process.
3. Which social media platforms/channels are you deploying?
4. Describe the goals/objectives you have for deploying social media in your company.
5. Who do you wish to target with your social media presence?
6. How many employees are working on your social media presence in your company?
7. Do you actively monitor your social media activities? If yes, how (E.g. tools used)?
8. Describe your company's social media usage policies.
9. Describe your company's social media activity plan? (E.g. timeframe for posts, projects)

After each question a blank field is added to provide space for the answers of the participants. No answers were predetermined; the interviewees were left with complete freedom to answer the open-ended questions. The questionnaire can be found in the Appendix (A2). This questionnaire was e-mailed to the study participants as an attached Microsoft Word document. The interviewees then had time to complete the questionnaire and, afterwards, sent them back per e-mail attachment. The two completed questionnaires were then translated into the English language and analyzed for this thesis.

4.1.1 Results
The following part comprises the findings from the first section of the case studies, the questionnaires conducted with the two German airlines.

First, it was essential to investigate if the airlines were familiar with the elements of a social media strategy and beyond that, if they were already integrated into their social media operations. Therefore, the questionnaire was constructed in such a way that all elements of a social media strategy supported by the literature research were present. Thereby, it became apparent whether or not the airlines included these elements in their approaches. In the case the participant provided an answer to a question, they are classified as aware of that element, if not they are classified as unaware (i.e. + for aware, - for unaware). The following table summarizes the airlines' comprehension of the elements of a social media strategy defined in the literature review.

Table 10 Comprehensions of social media strategies in the studied cases

Elements	TUIfly	Germania
Social media choice	+	-
Goals	+	-
Target audience	+	+
Resources	+/-	+/-
Monitoring	+	-
Policies	+	-
Activity Plan	+	-

The table shows that TUIfly is considered being aware of all elements of the social media strategy framework and, moreover, integrates them into their social media operations. Germania is only considered as aware of two social media strategy elements and, thus, appears to lack insight into this topic.

Concerning the completion of the interview questionnaire, TUIfly provided answers to all of the questions asked and, therefore, provided this study with valuable insights into their social media operations. Germania was only able to answer four questions, for their strategic approach to social media has yet to be established. Germania merely offered insights into their allocated human resources, their social media choice and their targeted audience.

The summary of the precise answers of the questionnaire are given below. The evaluation of these findings is jointly given with the outcome of the social media platform observations in chapter 4.3.

Regarding the social media choice, both airlines currently operate on equal networks, namely Facebook, Twitter and Google+. These present the biggest and the most popular networks, also in Germany, thus, a presence of the airlines on these sites is comprehensible. TUIfly, furthermore, has corporate accounts on Instagram and YouTube.

TUIfly indicates that social media has a high significance for their organization. The interviewee indicated:

> *"We fill [our Facebook] page on a daily basis with interesting content*
> *regarding the topics flying and traveling and we act as a direct contact*
> *person in case of questions and problems to our fans."*

After acknowledging the importance of social media for their organization, TUIfly developed their social media strategy from being a *"pure promotion channel (only for offerings) to a social media strategy that puts the focus on the interaction with the customers".*

TUIfly utilizes social media for their Customer Relationship Management (CRM) next to the advertising focused usage. They refer to their Facebook page as a *"meeting point for plane enthusiasts and interested customers."* The social media manager of TUIfly added:

> *"Through our social media channels we build a relationship with our fans*
> *and respectively potential customers and generate direct feedback this way."*

The airline identifies social media as an *"instrument for customer retention"* and therefore tries to respond to all customer questions and also react to online given feedback. The goal of TUIfly is to expand their social media operations in such a way that the networks will eventually serve as service channels for the customers.

> *"For the future we plan on increasing our social media activities regarding*
> *CRM in order to guarantee the customers and optimal 24/7 support service."*

The airline plans on significantly increasing their response rate and, thereby, improving the engagement of their followers.

Since Germania only established their online presence a year ago, they have yet to reach their desired capabilities in this division. Germania aims to expand its social media team in the near future. However, no explicit information about the number of employees was given.

Regarding the target audience, both airlines have differing aims. TUIfly targets German social media users of the age of 18-35, thus mainly the young adults. Germania on the other hand targets to a B2C and B2B audience. Hence, Germania does not only wish to appeal to potential customers of their flight tickets, but also to other industry members, such as suppliers.

The outcome of the question concerning the allocation of required resources shows that TUIfly and Germania do not have a separate department or employees that work on social media full time. The social media operations are done by the online marketing department at the former airline and the website management department at the latter. Furthermore, the employees responsible for this division have responsibilities beyond social media and can, thus, not completely engage their time and efforts into the social media operations. TUIfly additionally hired an intern, who also works on the social media presence; however, the intern is also only partially occupied with the social media tasks. Therefore, in total, one person is responsible for the social media operations at Germania, while at TUIfly one permanent employee and one intern is in charge. For this reason, both airlines were classified as neutral regarding the comprehension of the resources element in table 9, since only one or two partial working employees cannot be comparable to having the required human resources allocated to this task.

TUIfly is also very explicit about the content they post on their social networking sites:

> *"[…] there is content that is regularly posted, e.g. content about price*
> *campaigns and events […] and [additionally] special content is created*
> *in order to encourage fans to interact and play a part in our conversations*
> *[…] such as games, competitions or [we] ask our fans questions."*

The airline takes their differing purposes into account when deciding about the content that is to be published. This particularity shows the separate attention that the content of their strategic social media operation receives.

TUIfly is moreover aware of the importance of monitoring the online activities. They monitor the effectiveness of their social media presence with the aid of the Facebook statistics and an additional monitoring tool. No further information as to which precise tool is utilized or what exactly is monitored was provided.

TUIfly controls the usage of social networking sites with several rules summarized in their social media policy. This policy consists of the manner in which the employees are advised to approach their followers, the principles they have to consider before publishing content on the sites and the actions they are supposed to take in case uncontrollable online behavior occurs. The usage policies of TUIfly essentially consist of guidelines for the employees' behavior on their social networking sites. The content of TUIfly's policy is illustrated in table 11.

Table 11 Social media usage policy of TUIfly

Policy
Questions have to be answered as soon as possible. Rules for the evenings and weekends: the page should also be monitored outside of the office hours (after consultation).
We approach our fans personally on Facebook (on a first-name basis)
Don't be too serious; no image texts (authentic rather than constructed)
Allow interaction among the customers
Posts always have to be checked for spelling, grammar and CI-conformity before publication
Posts/Comments of fans that include offensive, impolite or racist content will be deleted (without proclamation)
Commercial advertising will be hidden. After repeated posts: Delete post and block user.

In the interview questionnaire, TUIfly equates their activity plan with having monthly *"planning meetings in which [the social media manager] and the intern as well as their writer takes part"*. In these meetings the employees discuss the topics and major activities that will be posted to the social media platforms of the airline. Regarding the frequency of their posts, the interviewee provided the information in another part of the questionnaire and mentioned that they fill the sites on a daily basis.

The employees in charge at TUIfly developed their strategy from being purely advertising focused to a more interactive strategy, in which the consumer engagement is central. In order to implement this planned strategy, the responsible employees engage in monthly meetings that discuss the overall plans for the upcoming weeks. In these meeting the topics of the content that is to be published and the activities of the company for their social media platforms in that month are discussed. Additionally, the spontaneous social media actions appear to be scheduled as well:

"Next to the planned posts, topics on short notice need to be discussed

and implemented such as events, press news/releases, job vacancies
and offerings."

Thus, the decision-making process consists of meetings with the responsible employees that together determine which activities are executed and consequently which topics and contents are published on the social networks. For the realization of the discussed contents, the same people engage in a further meeting to *"work together on the graphical implementation and text ideas".*

4.1.2 What social media strategies are used by the two studied airlines?

Summarizing the preceding section and, thereby, answering the fifth sub question, both airlines do not make use of any precise social media strategies. TUIfly, however, already developed a strategic approach to their social media operations, as visible in the comprehension of social media strategy elements in table 10 as well as their in-depth concepts about a social media policy and their desired goals. Whereas Germania has only started utilizing social media in the previous year and, thus, not yet figured out their appropriate way of usage, TUIfly is more mature in their strategic usage. The latter was found to consider all elements of the theoretical framework used in this thesis, namely the social media strategy framework (SMS7) by Effing (2013); whose elements were also determined as relevant during the systematic literature review outlined in chapter 3.4. Based on the questionnaire outcome, TUIfly is, therefore, seen to theoretically connect the four steps of the PDCA cycle. Germania, on the contrary, appears to skip the Plan stage and directly move to the Do stage, with defining their targets, choosing a social media platform and allocating resources, and, hence, does not consider following up and adapting their operations with neither the stage Check nor Act.

4.2 Observations

In order to see how the outcomes of the questionnaires relate to the practice, the social media presence of the two studied airlines was observed over a period of four weeks from 17th of June 2014 to 15th of July 2014. The activity of the airlines on all platforms they mentioned in the questionnaire was observed. The amount of posts was analyzed in order to see the engagement of the airlines with the social networks. The number of followers or fans on the specific social media platform of the two airlines in the beginning of the measurement was also retrieved from the observations. The number of followers can be clarified as the number of page likes the two airlines have on each platform. Table 12 provides an overview of these numbers.

Table 12 Airlines' social media activity

Social Media Platform	TUIfly		Germania	
	# Posts	*# Followers*	*# Posts*	*# Followers*
Facebook	**21**	**56.000**	**19**	**25.600**
Twitter	**26**	**31.700**	**10**	**342**
Google+	**26**	**231**	**19**	**117**
Instagram	**14**	**654**	-	-
YouTube	**0**	**382**	-	-

The numbers of followers differ visibly for both airlines. TUIfly has more than twice as much fans on Facebook compared to Germania. Likewise on Twitter, while more than 30.000 people follow TUIfly's posts, 342 people follow the Twitter activities of Germania. This difference can be attributed to the difference in company size and passenger numbers as described above. On Google+ both companies have less than 250 followers. On the two additional channels of TUIfly, namely Instagram and YouTube, follower numbers do not exceed 700 on the former and 400 on the latter.

The activities on both airlines' Google+ platforms will be disregarded for the analysis, since the posts on this network were congruent with the Twitter posts of TUIfly and the Facebook posts of Germania, thus, the tweets or Facebook posts appear to be automatically distributed to the Google+ sites of the airlines. Furthermore, the post likes on Google+ were almost in all cases only 1, but never exceeded 2. The YouTube channel of TUIfly appears to be irrelevant for this observation as well, for there was no activity on this video network on the side of the airline over the last three months (including the observed period). Therefore, a further observation of these platforms was regarded as not necessary.

For being able to analyze the purposes of the social media presence of the airlines, the posts were divided into post types. It was differentiated between advertisement, interaction, entertainment and information posts. These categorizations were retrieved from Peters et al. (2013); only advertisement was added to the authors' existing division. They are referred to as *distinct aspects* of the quality of social media posts (Peters et al., 2013, p.287). Posts with advertisements aim to promote the brand of the company and market their offerings. Interaction posts are defined as posts that aim to foster conversations among the online community. Entertainment posts are supposed to amuse the users. Finally, information posts are represented by publishing general content about the airlines and their operations.

Figure 4 and 5 depict the type of posts published by the airlines. The graphs provide information about the types for each platform in percentages of total posts. Absolute numbers are given in the parentheses.
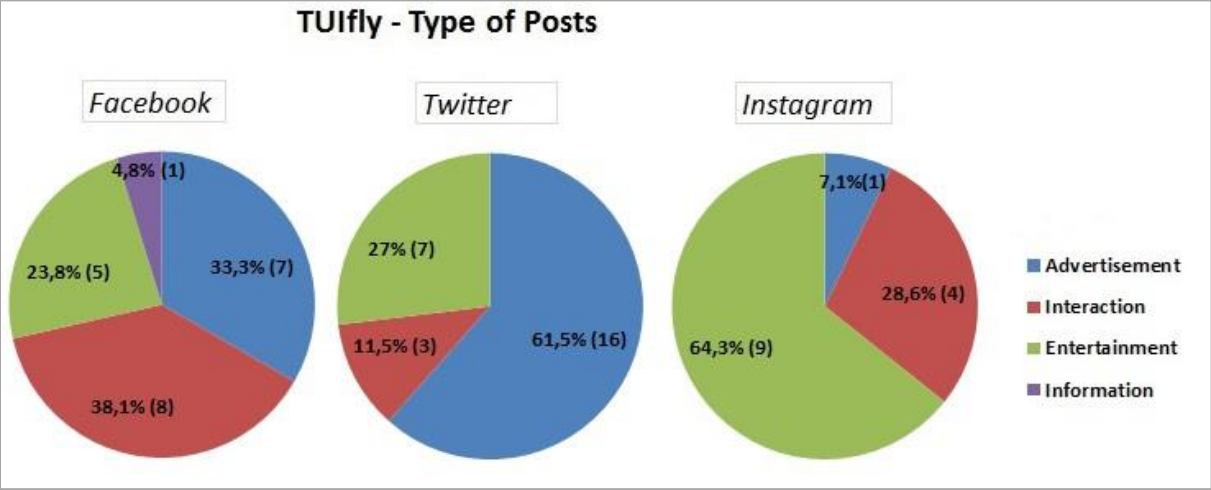

Figure 4: Type of Posts by TUIfly

It is apparent that most of the posts by TUIfly on Twitter are advertising related posts. On Facebook, the interaction and entertainment posts together dominate this platform, however, one-third of the posts also included advertisement. Instagram is almost ultimately used for entertainment purposes, followed by interactive posts. One information post was published by TUIfly to their Facebook page during the observed period.

For the majority of their posts, Germania mostly advertises their offerings and entertains their followers through their social media channels.
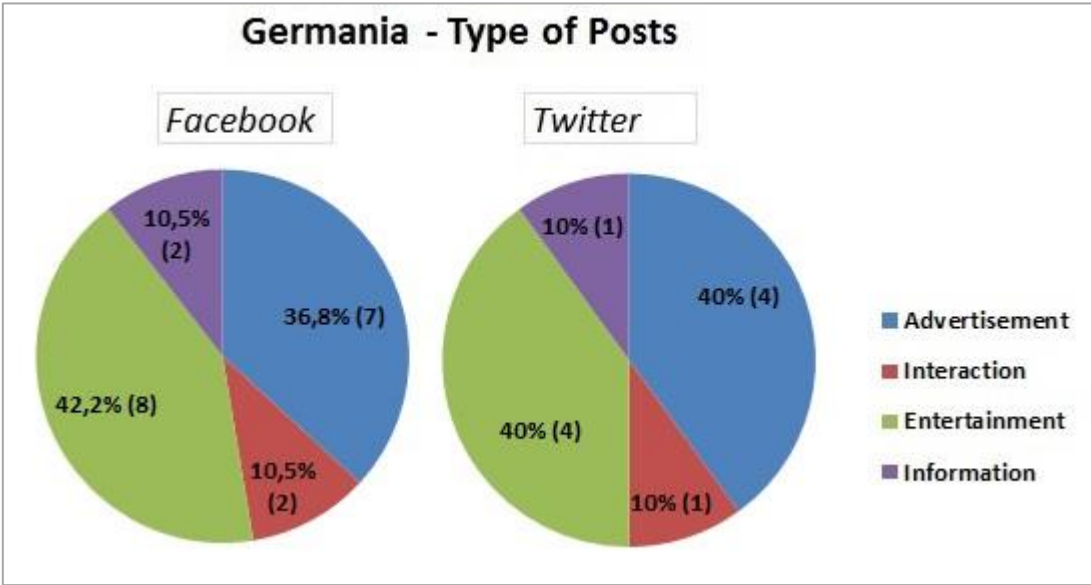

Figure 5: Type of Posts by Germania

In about 10% of the observed posts, Germania likewise informed their followers about the latest news and updates regarding their organization and interacted with their audience on both social media platforms.

Next to the type, the content of the posts published by the two airlines was moreover analyzed. As described in chapter 3, posts might include questions addressed to the audience, a link to the corporate website, or the organizations might add visuals, such as pictures and videos, to their published messages. The following tables depict the frequency of each type of content by social media platform for TUIfly and Germania in absolute numbers. Percentages of total posts are given in the parenthesis.

Table 13 TUIfly: Content of observed Posts

Social Media Platform	Content of Posts			
	Question	Link to the Website	Picture	Video
Facebook	7 (33,3%)	7 (33,3%)	3 (14,3%)	2(9,5%)
Twitter	2 (7,7%)	16 (61,5%)	6 (23,1%)	1(3,8%)
Instagram	4 (28,6%)	0 (0%)	14 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 14 Germania: Content of observed Posts

Social Media Platform	Content of Posts			
	Question	Link to the Website	Picture	Video
Facebook	3 (15,8%)	11 (57,9%)	18 (94,7%)	1 (5,3%)
Twitter	2 (20%)	5 (50%)	6 (60%)	0 (0%)

Both airlines provide links to the corporate websites in more than half of the observed posts on Twitter. These links include the offerings and specifications about the content posted. On Facebook, Germania also includes links to the website in the majority of their posts. TUIfly added links to one-third of their Facebook posts. The tables further show that both airlines include questions to their followers in their posts. However, in relation to the total amount of posts, it is visible that both airlines ask their audience questions in less than one-third, and even less than one-fifth of the total posts.

Germania included pictures in all of their Facebook posts except one. On Twitter, the airline attached a photograph to the majority of their tweets. By comparison, TUIfly does not regularly include visual content to their posts, except on Instagram, which is of course a photo-sharing platform. During the observed period, TUIfly attached two videos, Germania one to their posts on Facebook.

In order to gain an overview of the acceptance the social media operations of both airlines have, the amount of post likes, comments and shares are analyzed for the three platforms Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These three metrics are regularly chosen for measuring the acceptance of firms' social media activities (Peters et al., 2013). Whereas a like equates to online users' approval or pleasure with a certain post, a share means the online user reposted a certain post for their online community to see.

The following graph illustrates the course of the three chosen indicators of acceptance on TUIfly's official Facebook page.
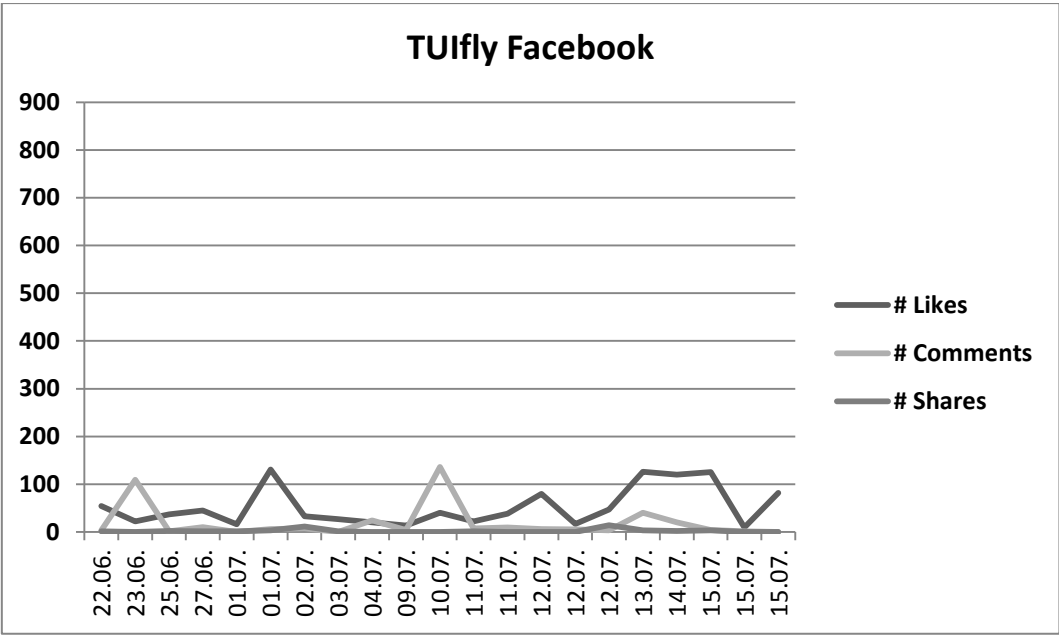

Figure 6 TUIfly: Number of Likes, Comments and Shares (Facebook)

In order to see the distribution of likes, comments and shares more clearly, the scale of the vertical line has been changed in figure 7; the highest number is hence 140.
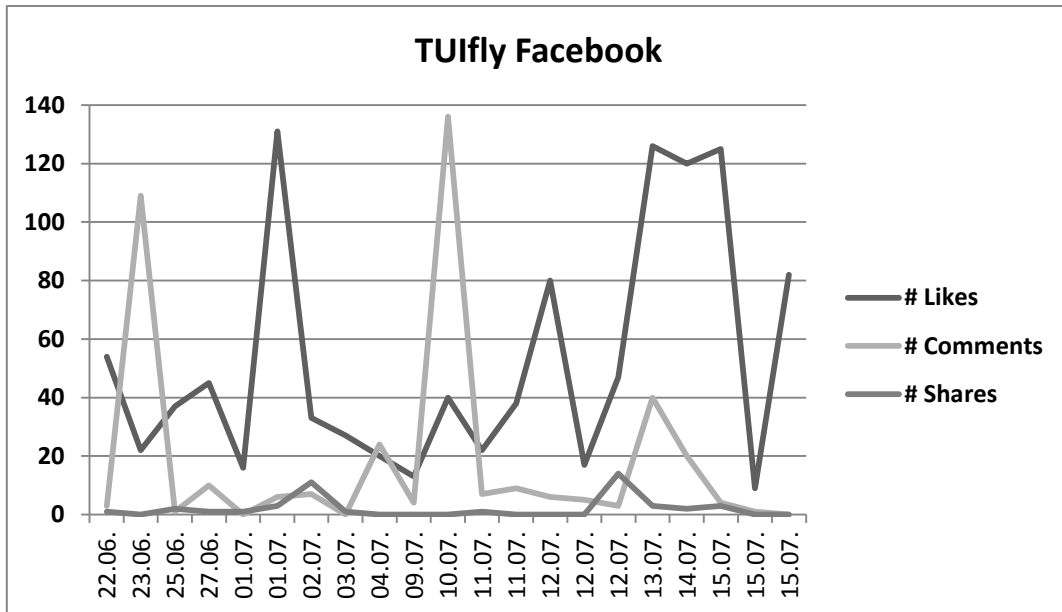
Figure 7 TUIfly: Number of Likes, Comments and Shares (Facebook)

Four posts of the total 21 of TUIfly attracted the most users and reached a like number of more than 120. The other numbers of likes during the observed period varied greatly between 9 and 82. Two posts that gained the largest amount of likes comprised entertainment related content; the other two incorporated interactive content with a question for the online audience, asking if *they liked the perspective out of an airplane*.

TUIfly gained the highest amount of comments, with posts that did not gain high numbers of likes. The amount of comments reached from 0 (in 3 cases) to 136. The first peak of number of comments on Facebook, with 109 people commenting, was a question towards the online audience asking them about *their favorite travel destinations starting with an 'E'*. TUIfly's Facebook page received the highest comment numbers with posting an open-ended sentence containing the words: "*This month I fly to …*"

Compared to the amount of likes and comments, the number of shares that TUIfly reached during the observed period was rather low. The numbers vary from 0 (in 9 cases) to the highest ones being 11 and 14.

On the Instagram site of TUIfly, the amount of likes varied between 42 and 100. This course is visible in the following figure.
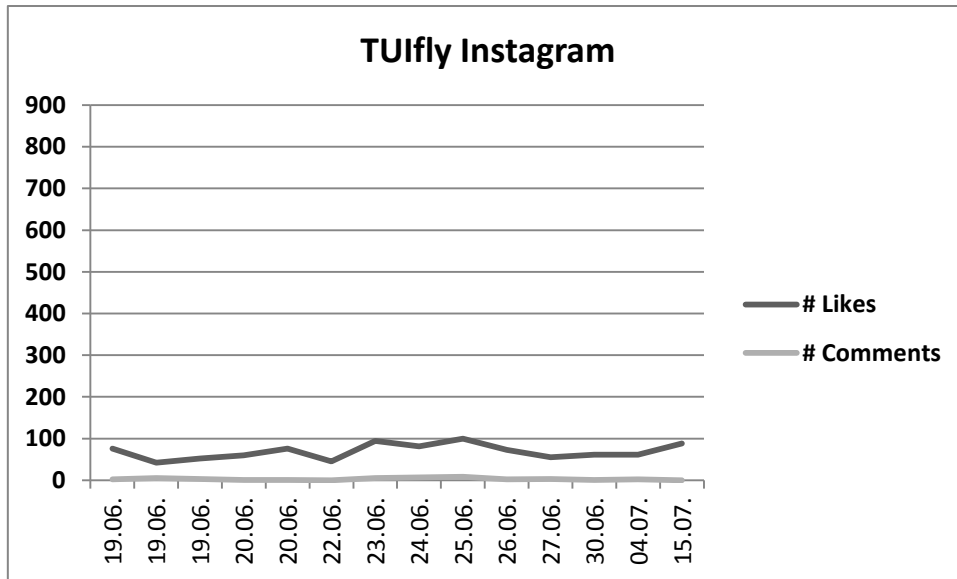
Figure 8 TUIfly: Number of Likes and Comments (Instagram)

The amount of likes on Instagram is distributed more consistently over the observed period of four weeks. All of the highest like numbers were gained from entertainment and interaction posts, which attributed for more than 90% of TUIfly's Instagram activity. The course of comments on Instagram almost equals the horizontal line in figure 7, and varied between 0 (in 2 cases) and 8. Amount of shares are not specified above, for there is no possibility to share a post on Instagram.

Figure 9 depicts the amount of likes on Germania's official Facebook page.

Figure 9 Germania: Number of Likes, Comments and Shares (Facebook)

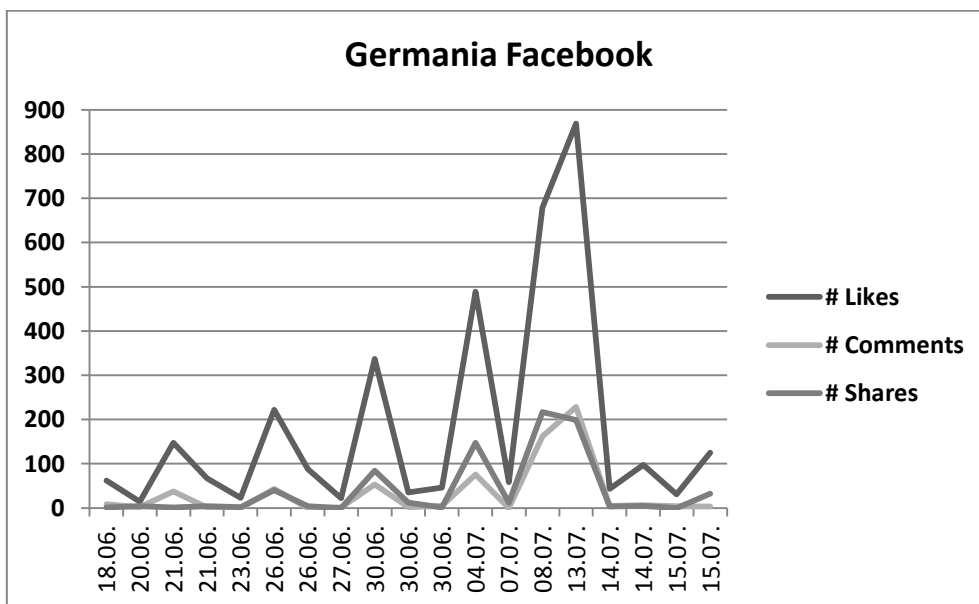The development of likes for Germania's Facebook account resembles a steady up and down course, with its peak on the 8th and 13th of July with their posts receiving a total of 679 and 869 likes. The preceding posts reached likes ranging from 14 to 489 and the amount of likes of the subsequent posts varied between 31 and 125. The posts that gained the highest acceptance were interaction and entertainment posts. The post with the highest number of likes included a hint about an ending *competition, in which users were able to win two flight tickets*. The second highest amount of likes received a post including a question towards the online community, asking them about *their guesses regarding a following football match*. The greatest amount of people commented on and shared these exact same posts. Comment numbers varied between 0 (in 3 cases) and 228, and the amount of people sharing Germania's posts differed between 0 (in 2 cases) and 217. The preceding four peaks of like numbers before the 8th of July visible in figure 9 contained content classified as entertainment as well as one question, and were all related to the FIFA World Cup, which took place at the time.

Concerning the customer service of the observed organizations, no user request was left unacknowledged. Both airlines responded to all questions posted in the comments sections of the posts on their Facebook or Instagram account (in the case of TUIfly). The exact numbers of comments throughout the observed period can be found in the Appendix (A3).

The amount of post likes for the Twitter accounts of both airlines differs enormously compared to the numbers of the beforehand illustrated platforms. Almost half of the content posted by TUIfly received 0 likes, while the other posts were liked by only 1 to 4 followers. For Germania, three posts received 0 likes and the remaining seven posts were liked by only 1 to 3 followers of the airline. The exact numbers can as well be found in the Appendix (A3).

Regarding further possible online activities on the networks, both airlines operated quite reluctantly. TUIfly only retweeted one post during the observed period, namely a post from the German airport in Nürnberg, which contained destination information about the airline. Germania, likewise, only shared one post on Facebook by a travel agent, including pictures from the opening of a flight route to a new destination of Germania and, furthermore, retweeted a post of the German airport in Hamburg once, about a flight offering of their carrier.

4.3 Evaluation of Findings
This part aims at combining the two sections of the case study and jointly evaluating their results. Whereas the completed questionnaires gave insights about the approaches of these

two airlines in the social media sector, the observation of their actual online behavior offered an additional perspective into their operations.

4.3.1 How do the airlines' social media strategies impact their social media operations?
Combining the findings of the questionnaire with the observations, the case studies show that a comprehension regarding a strategic social media framework does not automatically relate to a strong social media presence. The differences in numbers of post likes on both Facebook pages illustrated in the figures above clearly show that Germania exceeds the likes of TUIfly by more than half, almost doubles their amount of comments and surpasses their numbers of shares by more than 15 times, even though they did not mention any strategic concepts or purposes for their social media operations in the questionnaire. It appears that even though the follower numbers as well as the passenger numbers differ greatly between those airlines, this does not have consequences for the traffic on their social media sites. Germania seems to attract the attention of more users than TUIfly with their presence. In relation to the follower numbers, it can be concluded that Germania has a greater response rate than TUIfly, since compared to the amount of page likes, the amount of post likes, shares and comments of Germania is greater than these metrics of TUIfly. Similarly is the result for Twitter; while TUIfly certainly has a higher follower rate on Twitter than Germania (31.000 to 341), it is apparent that their retweet and like numbers do not differ.

TUIfly highlights in the questionnaire, that in order to create interaction and to engage the followers in conversations, they tend to post questions on their accounts next to other activities. However, the analyzed amount of questions posted show that both airlines do not make full use of the networking possibilities of the social media sites. It was visible that questions gained part of the highest response rates for both airlines and, thus, engaging in more conversations with the followers might increase their acceptance on these platforms. Regarding the rate of interaction one has to remark that personal messages that were sent to the airline or back to the followers are naturally not observable. Hence, one cannot clearly see the amount and frequency of conversations the airlines engage in, but judging from the observations, they could still increase their networking capacities.

In relation, TUIfly further outlined the importance of the content of their posts in the questionnaire, mentioning that games and competitions were integrated frequently. However, during the observed period, TUIfly did not include any competitions. TUIfly merely posted a small quiz game without any winning options during the observed four weeks. Germania, on the contrary, who did not mention anything regarding the existence of an activity plan or the

pre-determination of the published content, engaged their audience in a competition, which gained them the highest response rate during the observed period.

Both airlines frequently published content on their sites more than once during a day. Noteworthy is the fact that on the dates the airlines posted questions for the purpose of networking with their customers, they also tended to upload advertising related posts. This is probably the case due to the high attention the airlines received with their interaction and entertainment related posts, and, thus, aimed at using this awareness to increase ticket sales.

The deployment of additional networks, namely YouTube and Instagram, for pictures and videos mentioned by the interviewee appeared to show the strong efforts of TUIfly to successfully operate an entire social media infrastructure and offer variations to their followers. However, the observation showed that there was no activity on their YouTube channel over the past two months, so it can be concluded that they aim to primarily possess the channel rather than actively make use of it. The low number of employees, a lack of time or expertise might be the reason for not creating and sharing videos on this platform.

Moreover, the additional activities both airlines undertake on the platforms are rather limited. TUIfly stated in the questionnaire that their social media presence has a high significance, however, a large engagement in additional features was not observed; both airlines only retweeted each one post of an industry member. Sharing or retweeting posts of their followers regarding the airlines on Facebook or Twitter might win favors and consequently retain those users as customers for their brand.

After all, it seems that TUIfly has understood the main potential social media has and is already working on increasing their efficiency and usage possibilities. Their shift in utilizing social media for purposes beyond advertising, namely engaging customers and providing a contact surface for their individual issues proves that they already looked into the topic and advanced their strategic approach in the social networking area. TUIfly was, furthermore, found to consider all elements of a social media strategy that were determined in the literature review in their social media operations. However, the implementation of their strategic approaches and know-how about the handling of social media activities can be improved. They appear to not precisely monitor their activities and, thus, lack knowledge about, for instance, what attracts the most users, and therefore, fail to have a steadily high response rate.

Germania has yet to establish a strategy for their social media operations. Nevertheless, they already understand the possibilities and benefits they might gain from their social media

presence and utilize their social media platforms best considering the restricted capacities. With the assumption that Germania does not monitor their online activities, for they did not answer the question concerning monitoring in the questionnaire, one can conclude that they regardless possess a certain know-how about the preferences of their followers on their social media platforms and manage to attract their attention. The case of Germania shows that even though no complete strategic concept is internally developed or applied in an organization, the operations of a social media presence can still be successful, in terms of gaining the attention of a large audience and achieving a certain acceptance rate.

4.3.2 Should airlines deploy social media strategies and how should they do it?
Referring to the abovementioned findings, one can tentatively say that both airlines operate their Facebook sites effectively with high follower numbers and a regular response rate of their audience. Furthermore, the Instagram account of TUIfly appears to be operating successfully and to be widely accepted, mainly seen in relation to the follower numbers on this account. One might, thus, suggest that these airlines do not need to deploy social media strategies, since both airlines did not indicate having a clear strategy. However, both airlines can certainly improve their acceptance rate and ensure continuous high like, comment and share numbers, especially TUIfly. Furthermore, both airlines are not considered as handling the possibilities of Twitter successfully. Although TUIfly has a high amount of followers on Twitter, the amount of likes does not differ from those of Germania, who possess only one percent of the follower numbers compared to the former. Therefore, a strategic approach to the various social media platforms is still recommendable. When considering a social media strategy, the airlines should keep the PDCA cycle in mind, in order to not only consider all relevant elements of a social media strategy but also view social media as a continuous process that is flexible and whose strategic approaches are adaptable, in order to be successful in this fast changing environment.

5 ANALYSIS
For this part the findings of the literature review from chapter 3 as well as the results of the cases studies from chapter 4 will be jointly analyzed.

With the literature research it firstly became clear that there are various opinions about what a social media strategy is, thus, various authors define social media strategies differently. This does not only depict the diversity of the topic, but also the novelty of this strategic area. The determined definition is that a social media strategy aims to create an interactive customers

network in order to generate business value for the firm, while simultaneously considering usage policies for the guidance of the responsible employees. The literature review supported the social media strategy framework (SMS7) of Effing (2013), by dominantly referring to one or more of the seven elements in the various articles. Since these elements recurred in the majority of the reviewed sources, their significance regarding strategically deploying social media can be confirmed. These elements further composed the theoretical framework of the questionnaire in the case studies; the questions were designed to gain insight about the airlines' comprehension of these seven social media strategy elements. Whereas one airline considered all of the elements in their strategic approaches, the second airline was not classified as aware of most of those elements. Although Germania, therefore, lacked a social media strategy, there was no observed difference between both social media presences found during the observation of their online activities that could have led to this conclusion.

Regarding the meaning of the elements of the SMS7 framework, several case study findings indicate various possibilities in the assumptions about the aims of the required steps. Firstly, the special attention TUIfly indicated in the questionnaire about the content of their posts demonstrates a clear barrier between the separate focus on the content and the mere integration of content into the activity plan element. Hence, their focus supports the addition of the content element to the social media strategy framework. Furthermore, several points of TUIfly's usage policy overlap with what was determined in the literature review as being part of an activity plan, such as the regulations regarding the time of day of the employees' engagements on social media and the manner in which the audience is approached. While the pure presence of these guidelines is considered as the important factor, the overlapping might reveal an existing uncertainty about the exact descriptions and purposes of the elements. Both airlines lack of systematically monitoring activities suggests the addition of listening as a further element to the strategic social media framework, in order to gain more insights into the users' preferences on the platforms and, thereby, learn for future social media activities.

The strategic frameworks, although only 11 of the total 66 articles provide a complete concept, essentially match the content of the social media strategy framework as well as the definition of a social media strategy of chapter 3.2. Their steps and categories certainly overlap among each other as well as with the elements that are recurring in all sources. This finding shows that the scientific literature agrees about the main fundaments of a social media strategy and the authors, thus, advance their research in similar directions.

The majority of the frameworks found in the literature included an advertising or marketing purpose for social media operations. This might indicate that the initial focus of the economy

was on primary using social media as an additional sales channel rather than a platform for interacting with the customers, building relationships with them and, thereby, gaining insights into their preferences. The usage of social media for posting advertisement was also observed in the case studies. The focus on networking and building relationships with customers, which presents the main idea behind social media, appears to be less important in the academic concepts. However, both airlines were observed to operate a healthy balance of posting advertising and entertainment related content on their platforms. They understand and acknowledge the finding that purely utilizing social media as advertising channels does not result in a successful online presence. The stated development of TUIfly from utilizing social media solely for promotional purposes to a more networking focused approach, reflects the literature finding that companies should focus on creating engagement and interaction on social media and prevent the sole publishing of advertisements and product offerings for they herewith fail to attract much attention among users. Nevertheless, the rate of observable interaction with their audience was rather low at both airlines as mentioned in chapter 4.2, and can certainly be improved in order to achieve a greater online acceptance.

TUIfly, moreover, considered several points outlined in the literature review. For instance, their specified goal to significantly increasing their response rate and, thereby, improving the engagement of their followers, depicts the setting of a clear objective of the airline and as identified in the literature review might aid in achieving this desired outcome. Moreover, the policies of TUIfly illustrated in table 11 reflect precisely the main points that were identified in the academic literature, such as the responsibilities of the staff to edit the posts or the regulations about actions against offensive user behavior. Hence, the airline considers all relevant elements in order to minimize potential risks and support the employees with guidelines for desired online behavior. This validates the literature findings with an actual example of policy adoptions in an organization.

The literature, furthermore, clearly defined the employees of a company as a key factor for achieving success with social media. Both airlines, however, and contrary to prior expectations, only employ one half time staff member for their operations. This might indicate a lack of corporate interest or importance of social media to the management of these companies. Even though the importance of social networking sites in the tourism sector and especially in the airline industry was previously investigated, these particular cases do not comply with this emphasized importance. The investigated shortcoming of employees allocated to this division might simultaneously present the lack of strategic focus, as social

media is, therefore, seen more as an additional rather than a central operation to these organizations. Moreover, the limited amount of resources might stand in a relation to the little observed activities undertaken by both airlines. Since their work time is restricted to several tasks, they might not be completely occupied and committed to the social media presence. An increase of human resources allocated to this task might be beneficial for a more extensive social media usage and in turn a greater response rate.

Even though the activities of both airlines on Google+ were not further analyzed, the fact that the platforms posts equated to the posts of their bigger platforms shows that the organizations already integrate their various social media sites with each other. They both are, hence, seen to have an ecosystem view on social media, which is recommended for a better management of all platforms. The integration of links to their corporate website, furthermore, supports the finding of considering all platforms as related elements and not as stand-alone networks, which is comprised as a characteristic in the social media choice element.

Another valuable finding from the cases is that Germania has yet to establish a social media strategy, which therefore confirms the assumption made in the introduction that their usage happens in a rather intuitive, reactive and thus spontaneous way. Since they do not have a strategic approach available, but still successfully operate several networks, the airline is assumed to operate their social media platforms according to the sole opinions of the responsible employees and their individual suppositions. However, since they reached even higher numbers of responses on their Facebook page compared to TUIfly, who on the contrary has a strategic approach to this task, these employees seem to be well informed about the potentials and possibilities of social media.

The findings from the case study, moreover, indicate that the two German airlines investigated are not yet operating social media to its full potential. Even though both carriers are considered as being successful on their Facebook platforms, an increase in social media activities as well as an increase in number of likes and comments, and thus a greater range of interaction with their audiences since social media are aimed to build networks and communicate, is an achievable objective for both airlines. Social media is popularly present for almost a decade now, but it is still not self-evident that organizations have the knowledge and expertise to deploy it strategically. Nevertheless, both airlines possess a considerable amount of followers or fans on their platforms and likewise present themselves and their portfolio well on their social media sites.

Regarding the PDCA cycle by Deming, both airlines, therefore, are not viewed as successfully completing the four stages. Although, TUIfly was seen to determine all of the four steps with their specifications during the questionnaire, they appear to fail at monitoring their activities appropriately in order to gain insights into their followers' preferences, learn from their operations and, thereby, improve their strategy. Germania on the other hand, did not predetermine any of the PDCA steps and was observed to also lack knowledge and actions in the Check stage. With a greater focus on measuring the current activities, Germania is more likely to keep the audience interested, maintain their attention and be able to only repeat the successful social media activities. Germania, moreover, appears to be more focused on the Do stage of the PDCA cycle, since they were found to engage in more activities, e.g. the posting of visuals and competitions, whereas TUIfly is rather focused on the Plan stage, but fails to transform their plans into actions. Both cases show that all stages need to be thoroughly considered for achieving the best possible outcome.

After all, the lack of observed differences regarding the social media activities of both airlines leads to the conclusion that having an elaborate social media strategy is not necessarily related to a more positive result and a consequently more successful online presence. This conclusion is, however, restricted to the in this thesis studied examples.

6 CONCLUSION
The following chapter will elaborate on the conclusions of this thesis.

Primarily, the state of the field regarding social media strategies in the literature can be classified as comprehensive but extendable. The academic field represented by the selected and, thus, reviewed articles deals with the elements of social media strategies, offers definitions to this vague topic and covers the implications for a successful online presence, however, the vast majority fails to provide strategic concepts ready for implementation. Only 11 of the 66 sources offer theoretical guidelines for organizations that consider operating social media corporately. Due to this lack of academic knowledge, the limited appliance of social media strategies in these particular case studies is expectable. This lack of strategic outlook did, however, not restrict the observed organizations in their social media operations and acceptability among the online audience. Therefore, one can conclude that in these particular cases the deployment of social media does not require an elaborate social media strategy. A potential relationship between a social media strategy and the actual social media activities was, hence, not identified. Thus, the importance of implementing a social media

strategy or a strategic approach to social media in businesses as indicated in the academic literature might not be as important in practice after all. Learning by doing, like the case of Germania shows and, thus, having a flexible approach to social media rather than deploying a strategic framework might suffice for operating corporate social media sites.

Due to the highest response rates the interaction posts of both airlines gained during the observed period, a focus on engaging the audience and interacting with followers appears to be a key factor for social media success. Therefore, versatile activities on the platforms and more interactive posts are recommended. The airlines could in turn use the achieved rate of engagement in order to increase their sales or retain customers for their organizations.

The low variety of social media channels operated by both airlines, as well as the repetitive mentioning of Facebook and Twitter as the popular sources of success on social media in the academic literature, might suggest an adaption of the term social media strategy. These two channels appear to be the only channels systematically utilized in the studied cases and, thus, a focus on solely these two platforms in a potential strategy might lead to more precise, coordinated and, consequently, more effective outcomes.

In conclusion and to answer the main research question included in the introduction of this thesis, a social media strategy is an elaborate but flexible plan of activities for optimally deploying social media tools in order to create an interactive network of customers that generates business value to the company. Moreover, a social media strategy was not found to have an impact on the social media operations of the studied airlines.

Referring back and, thereby, supporting the quote of Winston Churchill, the best and most elaborate strategy is, hence, useless if it does not lead to the desired outcomes.

6.1 Recommendations

For completing the process described in the research model and thus evaluating the current social media strategies, the final step is to offer a recommendation for possible changes to the framework with the aid of the results from this thesis.

First of all, considering the scientific literature findings of this research, the SMS7 framework by Effing (2013), utilized as the theoretical framework of this study, can be verified to certainly comprise the relevant elements regarding a social media strategy. The significance of the elements can, therefore, be validated and the scope of the framework can be considered as accurate. However, in order to incorporate all the literature review findings, this thesis comes to the conclusion that two further elements should be added to the framework, namely the content and listening element. The improved framework with the additional elements can be seen in the following figure.
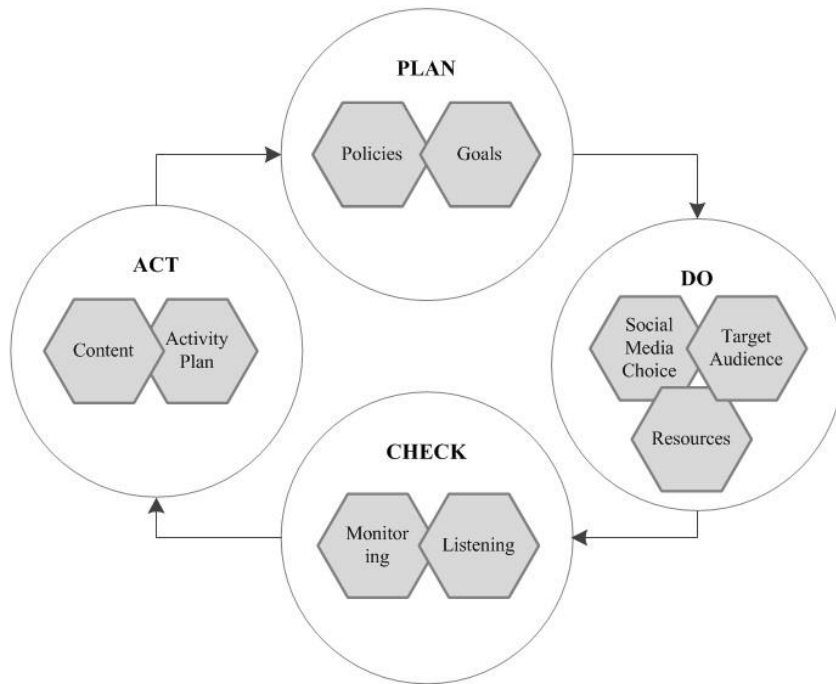
Figure 10: Proposed Framework; SMS meets PDCA

The integration of the social media strategy elements with the PDCA cycle clarifies the need for continuous improvement regarding a social media strategy. It is not a singular step to take, but rather a cyclical and, hence, endless process to deploy social media strategically. The completion of the cycle, which implicates the consideration of all social media strategy elements, presents the desired outcome for organizations and can act as an elaborate guideline for social media operations.

Furthermore, adding the elements of content and listening extents the existing framework, makes it more complete and adjusts it to the aforementioned literature review and case study findings. This addition is, nevertheless, a mere recommendation based on the outcome of the conducted literature review. It is, however, arguable to integrate the content element into the activity plan element as well as to integrate the listening element into the monitoring element. Nonetheless, separately focusing on the content might lead to more effective publications of interesting and valuable information on the social media platforms. Listening as an additional element for measuring the impact of a social media strategy and its activities might aid in closing the PDCA cycle and, therewith, ensure a steady improvement of the social media operations.

7 DISCUSSION

The following part acknowledges this study's limitations. Furthermore, suggestions for future research possibilities are provided in chapter 7.2.

7.1 Limitations

The limitations of this study are primarily found in the second methodological part of the thesis, namely the case study.

A first limitation of this study is the execution of the case studies. Due to the time constraints on the side of the participating airlines, only the completion of interview questionnaires was feasible. In a face-to-face or telephone interview, further questions as well as potential follow-up questions would have been possible, which would consequently lead to more in-depth outcomes.

One limitation of the observation of the social media sites is the lack of technological tools to observe and monitor the activities of the two airlines. The observations were done manually and analyzed with the aid of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. With the support of complex monitoring tools, the observation would have potentially offered greater insights and more analysis possibilities.

The conclusions and relations drawn between the answers provided in the questionnaires and the observations of the actual social media operations of the airlines cannot be viewed as representative. The reasoning is purely an example that cannot be classified as overall applicable.

Regarding the literature research, the only potential limitation is the scope of the conducted review. The databases that were investigated for relevant sources denied the access to articles in numerous cases. Several articles were thus not retrievable due to monetary liabilities or membership access regulations. Therefore, some potentially valuable findings regarding social media strategies were not considered in this research.

7.2 Future Research

In order to validate the findings and gather more data about this relatively new research area, further research is essential.

For future research it is advisable to investigate more cases. In this way research can prove if the elements of the social media strategy framework are applied in other companies and gain additional knowledge about the adoption and development processes at the specific firms. One might also discover strategic frameworks companies might have internally developed with more cases to study. The questioning in future projects should by all means be executed

with in-depth interviews in order to gather all possible information. These steps are crucial in order to be able to generalize the findings to an entire industry or market.

It is also advisable to investigate if the social media strategy framework is applied in other tourism sectors or generally in other industries. Covering various companies from different industries at a time delivers more valuable and reliable results, which might lead to the development of internationally applicable frameworks.

For the validation of the social media strategy framework, it might be moreover useful to further investigate the need to separate the elements content and activity plan, as well as listening and monitoring. This might be done with the aid of comparing the social media success of companies that, for instance, put a greater emphasis on their published content with companies that develop their content simultaneously with the other social media activities.

In future studies, the observation of social media sites is recommended to be executed in cooperation with the future study participants, in order to take the data that is not publicly available into account, such as the rate of interaction with users through personal messages.

Another future research possibility might focus on the creation of a complete social media strategy framework that integrates a potential checklist for the implementation of the determined elements and, thereby, guides a company at the beginning of their preferably successful social media operations. This might help companies that lack the knowledge in this area, but aim to engage in social media anyway.

After all, new research findings are constantly added to the scientific literature and, thus, continuously integrating the latest additions and therewith gained knowledge in this area into the systematic literature research is certainly recommendable.

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APPENDIX

A1 Systematic Literature Research – Metadata

Year	# items	Discipline	# items	Type	# items	Research method	# items
2014	9	Management & Governance	23	Journal article	47	Theoretical exploratory	33
2013	24	Information Science	18	Professional Magazine	10	Case Study	21
2012	13	Travel / Tourism	6	Conference Proceeding	9	Theoretical explanatory	6
2011	12	Marketing	4			Survey research	2
2010	6	Communication Science	4			Policy analysis	2
2009	1	Public Relations	3			Theoretical descriptive	1
2008	1	Medicine/Healthcare	3			Design science research	1
		Public Administration	3				
		Computer Science	1				
		Environmental Research	1				

A2 Interview questionnaire

Social Media Strategy Evaluation – Interview questionnaire

- *Personal Information*

Company:

Department:

Name:

Job title:

- *Questions [Please provide your answers in the blank fields]*

What is in your opinion your company's social media strategy?

How do you create social media strategies? Describe the development process.

Which social media platforms/channels are you deploying?

Describe the goals/objectives you have for deploying social media in your company.

Who do you wish to target with your social media presence?

How many employees are working on your social media presence in your company?

Do you actively monitor your social media activities? If yes, how (E.g. tools used)?

Describe your company's social media usage policies.

Describe your company's social media activity plan? (E.g. timeframe for posts, projects)

Thank you for your time and efforts!

A3 Social media observations

A3.1 TUIfly

Facebook - TUIfly			
Dates	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares
22.06.	54	3	1
23.06.	22	109	0
25.06.	37	1	2
27.06.	45	10	1
01.07.	16	0	1
01.07.	131	6	3
02.07.	33	7	11
03.07.	27	0	1
04.07.	20	24	0
09.07.	13	4	0
10.07.	40	136	0
11.07.	22	7	1
11.07.	38	9	0
12.07.	80	6	0
12.07.	17	5	0
12.07.	47	3	14
13.07.	126	40	3
14.07.	120	20	2
15.07.	125	4	3
15.07.	9	1	0
15.07.	82	0	0

Twitter - TUIfly		
Dates	# Favorites	# Retweets
17.06.	0	0
18.06.	0	2
19.06.	1	0
23.06.	3	0
23.06.	0	0
23.06.	4	0
24.06.	0	0
25.06.	1	0
26.06.	1	1
26.06.	0	1
26.06.	1	4
27.06.	0	0
27.06.	2	1
30.06.	0	0

30.06.	2	1
01.07.	1	1
02.07.	0	0
03.07.	0	1
03.07.	2	2
04.07.	1	0
04.07.	3	3
08.07.	0	0
08.07.	2	5
14.07.	0	0
15.07.	3	3
15.07.	0	2

Instagram - TUIfly		
Dates	# Likes	# Comments
19.06.	76	2
19.06.	42	5
19.06.	52	3
20.06.	60	1
20.06.	76	1
22.06.	45	0
23.06.	94	5
24.06.	81	7
25.06.	100	8
26.06.	73	2
27.06.	55	3
30.06.	61	1
04.07.	61	2
15.07.	88	0

A3.2 Germania

Facebook - Germania			
Dates	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares
18.06.	62	8	1
20.06.	14	2	4
21.06.	147	37	1
21.06.	67	1	4
23.06.	23	0	2
26.06.	222	43	40
26.06.	88	0	4
27.06.	22	1	0
30.06.	337	53	84
30.06.	35	2	12
30.06.	46	5	1
04.07.	489	76	147
07.07.	58	0	12
08.07.	679	162	217
13.07.	869	228	199
14.07.	43	5	3
14.07.	97	6	5
15.07.	31	4	0
15.07.	125	3	32

Twitter - Germania		
Dates	# Favorites	# Retweets
20.06.	3	1
23.06.	3	1
26.06.	2	0
30.06.	1	1
30.06.	2	1
30.06.	3	2
04.07.	1	1
07.07.	0	0
15.07.	0	0
15.07.	0	0