# Social media strategies in practice, are they actually being used?

*An analysis on social media (strategy) implementation of Dutch SMEs*

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## Abstract

The business environment is aware of the business opportunities social media has to offer. Due to the recognition of opportunities and importance of social media use for business purposes, a lot of authors in the field of social media (marketing) recommend using a social media strategy. However, does this really happen in practice and does it matter? In this empirical research the goal was to find out whether or not companies are using an explicit social media strategy for business purposes. In addition, this research will also take a closer look towards these strategies and whether they are planned or emergent. Furthermore, this research will give an insight if it is useful to have a planned strategy in the fast changing online environment of social media platforms and will as well shed a light on how companies establish their social media strategies. Evaluation of collected data from semi-structured interviews held at local Dutch best-practice SMEs revealed that most companies do not execute a social media strategy. The process of strategy development is taken too easy and the use of marketing information is lacking. This study unveils that there is need for a more explicit strategy amongst companies before using social media. The results of this study are reflected and compared to the existing literature, what led to the conclusion that emergent strategies are more efficient in the social media environment then planned strategies. An emergent strategy leaves space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, and be able to respond quickly to new opportunities. Based on reflecting the results with existing literature it became clear that a full social media implementation is missing at most companies. Based on data collected from literature research, and semi-structured interviews a new social media strategy implementation canvas has been developed. This new canvas should be a rule of thumb for efficient social media (strategy) implementation and use for business purposes. This research paper serves as a basis for larger scaled research towards development of social media strategy. It serves as a basis towards the search synergy optimization between social media strategy formulation and implementation.

# Colophon

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# 1. Introduction

This chapter will provide an introduction to social media and the establishment of its strategies, its business purpose and the interesting research topic that comes with it. Furthermore the main research problem and sub questions will be treated in this chapter.

## 1.1 The development of social media strategies

In modern society, we cannot think of a world without social media. According to Zuckerberg (2017), Facebook has more than 2 billion users. In terms of technological in the popular zeitgeist social media is hard to ignore. Social media is everywhere on the web, the news, the phone and even, on occasion, in the court. Most major websites have some connection to social media sites or do themselves utilize social networking design patterns. As a result of this digital gold rush that social media has enjoyed, there has also been an increase in the use of social media to advertise and brand a company's identity (Carmichael & Cleave (2012). With the rapid growth and availability of network bandwidth and technology, social media has a significant increase in user count. This has led to an increase in user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Qualman (2010), there is a fundamental shift in how we communicate and it is enabled by the unprecedented rise of what is called "social media". Social media touches nearly every facet of our personal and business lives. In business it is not just for the Marketing and Public Relations departments, it is rather imperative for social media to be an integral part of a companies overall strategy. Different departments of companies recognized the potential of the use of the social networking systems in helping to achieve company goals. Furthermore, according to van den Bulte and Wuyts (2007), some of the social networking systems are the most popular and frequently visited websites that are currently available. Due to the rising importance of social networking systems social media strategies are developed and implemented within companies. According to Carmichael and Cleave (2012), businesses are increasingly attempting to adopt and implement social media as an integral part of work life and to enhance competitive advantage. Social media has enabled organizations to gain exposure to the needs, opinions and desires of a wider audience and also provide an opportunity for connecting with a highly targeted population that could be potential customers to an organization (Weisgerber & Butler, 2011). Companies often follow the social media trend without clear objectives or a strategic approach for its business use. Research has shown that for proper implementation of social media it is important to design a framework or method to provide the successful implementation between social media and business goals. Resources as skills, time, humans and technology are needed when adopting social media. Therefore, the need to measure return on investment (ROI) arises. However, it is a challenge to measure the efficiency and ROI on a social media approach that has not been strategically designed (Schroeder, 2014). According to Persuad, Spence and Rahman (2012), managers felt that because of social media is easy to use and inexpensive, they did not think about organizational readiness or technology infrastructure before implementing social media in their business. Similarly, they did not make a plan prior to using social media and they did not have a clear long-term strategy as how they would integrate social media into various aspects of their business. Literature shows that there is a lack of proper implementation of a social media strategy. Due to this lack of implementation of strategy companies fail to fully exploit the many possibilities and opportunities social media has to offer. As shown above, social media grows in importance to organizations for business opportunities, although the lack of a proper implementation withholds companies from its full potential, leading to a lack on return of investment. To make sure these social networking systems are used to achieve companies' goals, there are different social media strategies designed to achieve the company goals in an efficient way according to the literature. In current literature there seems to be a lack of information whether companies are actually using a social media strategy or not, how it is operationalized and what is realized of this strategy. In this empirical research the goal is to find out whether or not companies are using a social media strategy. In addition, this research will provide a closer look towards what a strategy is, how this strategy is operationalized and what is realized of this strategy. A lot of authors' advice the use a social media strategy. However, does this actually happen in practice and does it really matter?

## 1.2 Social media usage over the years

The following information will provide insights in the usage of social media. The author of this paper will draw a conclusion regarding the prognosis of the importance of social media for business purposes based on data collected from the literature, current information of social media usage, and information of social media usage over the past couple of years. Based on the research of Pew Research Centre (2018), the amount of American adults using networking sites significantly grew from 7% of all adults in 2005 to a stunning 69% in 2016. There is saturation in growth of social media users. Young adults continue to use Facebook at high rates, but older adults are joining in increasing numbers as a new group.[1] It is interesting to see how fast social media usage grew amongst U.S. adults the past couple of years. However, there is stagnation within the group of young adults. Noticeable and important is that people keep using social media sites up to now. The increase in adults who use social media sites among older adults is important, due to the fact it offers new chances for social media regarding marketing and business. Combined with the lack of proper implementation and strategy, there might be an increased need for efficient and distinctive implementation strategies, as well as social media strategies on its own. Based on these numbers, the growth will stagnate but people will keep using social media. These are promising numbers for the future of social media usage.

Another important indicator is the frequency people are online on different social media platforms. Figure 1 shows how often social media platforms are used. It shows that among people who use Facebook, 74% uses it daily. In addition, 17% of adults

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[1] (Pew Research, 2018); retrieved from: http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media

use Facebook weekly. Based on these indicators, it is expected that social media will retain its importance in terms of business purposes for companies. The literature review in this paper is based on articles between 2010 up and until 2017. This is important to notice, due to the fact that during this period there was growth in older adults (50+) using social media. This might create new business or marketing opportunities for companies, as companies can now reach a new target audience. The importance of efficient social media implementation and a distinctive strategy is expected to grow, due to the new target audiences appearing on social media platforms.

**Figure 1. Usage of social media, following frequencies (Pew Research, 2018)**



*Among the users of each social media site, the % who use that site with the following frequencies*

## 1.3 Scientific and practical relevance

The scientific relevance of this research paper is as follows: in this empirical research the goal is to find out whether or not companies are using a social media strategy. In addition, this research will provide a closer look towards what a strategy is, how this strategy is operationalized and what is realized of this strategy. A lot of authors' advice the use a social media strategy. However, does this actually hap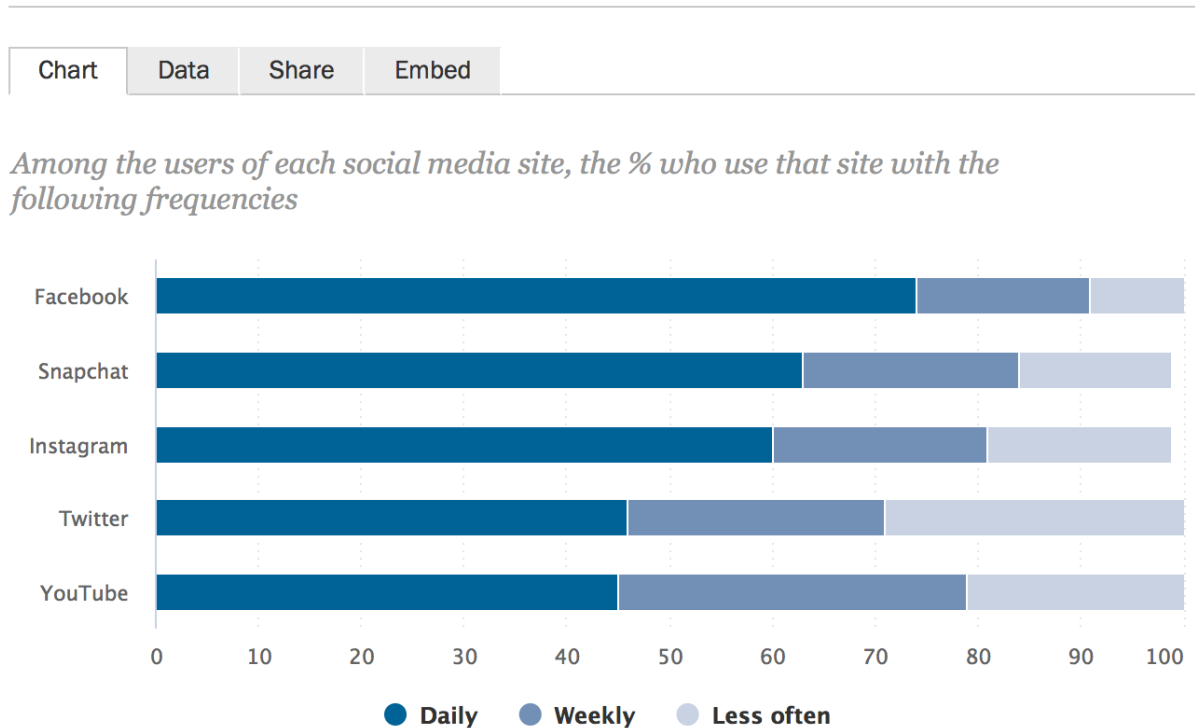pen in practice and does it really matter? In addition, there seems to be a gap between social media strategy formulation and social media implementation. This research paper will also shed a light on the synergy between those two aspects. The main focus is to find out whether or not companies are using a social media strategy for daily social media activities for business purposes. In addition, it is interesting to have a closer look towards whether this strategy is emergent or planned. Furthermore this research will give an insight on whether or not it is useful to have a planned strategy in the fast changing online environment of social media platforms. In the literature there is a lack of information on whether or not a company has mindfully implemented social media (Culnan et al., 2012), as well as there is lack of information on how companies actually implement and operate social media. It is unknown if companies actually implement a strategy or randomly provide content for social media. It is also interesting to find out if companies use a social media framework or model as suggested by the literature.

Practical relevance:

- It is useful for companies to know whether or not they should implement a social media strategy.
- It is useful for companies to know how to formulate a social media strategy and how to implement this.
- It is useful for companies to find out if this strategy should be planned or emergent.
- It is useful for companies to get information on how to implement new social media platforms.
- It is useful for companies to get to know the differences between emergent versus planned social media strategy implementation.

Assuming most companies do not follow a social media strategy, it would be interesting to see if implementing a social media strategy is beneficial for the company in terms of achieving organizational goals for social media. The outcome of this research could also suggest that a more emergent strategy could be more efficient due to the fast changing online environment of social media platforms. This research will give an insight in the differences between planned vs. emergent social media use.

## 1.4 Frameworks and research papers as research tool

To make sure social networking systems are used efficiently to achieve companies' goals, there are different social media strategies designed to achieve the company goals in an efficient way according to the literature. In this empirical research the goal is to find out whether or not companies are using a social media strategy. In addition, this research will provide a closer look towards what a strategy is, how this strategy is operationalized and what is realized of this strategy. Three research papers with corresponding frameworks will serve as a research tool in order to find out if companies are using a social media strategy. The social media strategy canvas of Effing and Spil (2016) will be used as the main research tool to find out if companies are using a social media strategy. Due to the collection of all key factors combined into a clear canvas this is the most favorable framework to use. In addition, the research paper of Culnan, Mchugh and Zubillaga (2010) will be used to find out how social media is implemented by the companies. This framework is the most favorable to use due to it having the most citations in the specific field of social media (strategy) implementation. The third research paper that will be used is the research paper from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). This research paper is used to find out how social media is operationalized and partly for social media (strategy) implementation. This research consists of a list of ten key factors for both social media strategy implementation and content operationalization. This research paper is favorable due to it having the most citations in the field of social media for business purposes. Besides these research papers other models and frameworks will be discussed as well. The three research papers as mentioned above will be used to serve as a basis for the interview framework of this research paper.

## 1.5 Research question and Motivation

As mentioned in section 1.3 this empirical research the goal is to find out whether or not companies are using a social media strategy. In addition, this research will provide a closer look towards what a strategy is, how this strategy is operationalized and what is realized of this strategy. In addition, it is also interesting to research the gap between social media strategy formulation and implementation. Furthermore it is interesting to investigate the difference between emergent versus planned social media strategies. The research question of this paper is as follows: " Do Dutch best-practice SMEs use an explicit social media strategy and how do they implement social media?"

- According to the literature, what is social media and what is a social media strategy?
- What are the key factors for an efficient social media strategy?
- What are the key factors for an efficient social media implementation?
- Do Dutch business-to-consumers SMEs establish a social media strategy? If so, how do they do it?
- How are the social media strategies implemented and what is realized from this strategy?
- How does an emergent social media strategy affect the organizational goals of social media?
- What does the establishment process of a social media strategy looks like?

# 2. Literature review

In this chapter the ways of how the literature review has been conducted will be discussed. Furthermore the data collected from the literature review will be revealed.

## 2.1 Literature review method

In this research paper the method of Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller and Wilderom (2013) will be used for the literature research. According to the authors, better legitimization of every choice made during the review process enhances the value of a literature review. Many literature reviews do not offer clarity about how and why they obtained their specific samples of literature. In addition they state that well-explicated and rigorous literature reviews also have a higher chance of getting published. To ensure these aspects, the method of Wolfswinkel et al. (2013), will be used. Wolfswinkel et al. (2013), use the Grounded Theory as a method for rigorously reviewing literature. The research paper of Webster and Watson (2002) plays a large role in the research paper of Wolfswinkel et al. (2013), since their model is based on a model of Webster and Watson. The Grounded Theory Method is intended as a guide, to help systematize the reviewing process for a more optimal outcome that contributes to theoretical progress. There is not just a one size fits all, and there is room to deviate from Wolfwinkels et al (2013) proposed model, as long at is well motivated. It is important that each write-up of reasons behind each of the choices made per step and stage forces the researcher to document the motivation or logic for each decision made. The Grounded Theory Literature Review Method consists of five stages and is iterative in nature. First of all the first stage 'define' will be executed and described extensively. Furthermore the stages 'search', 'select', 'analyze' and 'present' will be executed. Due to the executive nature of the last mentioned aspects these will not be described. The information regarding the complete process of the aspects 'search', 'select', 'analyze' can be found in the research paper of Wolfswinkel et al. (2013).

The first step of the method of Wolfwinkel et al (2013) is 'define'. In order to efficiently perform a systematic literature search one needs to define the criteria for inclusion and/or exclusion of an article in the data set. The first task involves marking out the scope of the review as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria. For example, one may restrict the kinds of publication outlets, setting a certain threshold such as the impact factor of an outlet; or one may determine a certain time frame of the publication. The most important search words in this research will be "Social media AND implementation" and "Social media AND strategy". In this research the first important factor is the time frame of publication. The time frame will lie between 2010 up and until 2017, due to the massive increase in the amount of social media users since the year 2010. Furthermore the literature which will be found on the words selected as mentioned earlier, will be sorted on the highest amount of citations will be set above 25 citations for a paper. This is due to the high amount of research papers found on the words "Social media AND implementation". There are more subject areas when these words come up, for example in the aftercare in the healthcare sector. The second step of 'define' is identifying the fields of search. The author will set a limit to; computer science, social sciences, business, management, accounting, economics, decision sciences and environmental science. There are a couple of additional subject areas due to possible interesting literature within these areas due to the broad research field of social media implementation. Therefore decision sciences and environmental science has been added to the list. The third step of 'define' is the selection of the outlets and databases. The main databases used will be: Scopus, Google Scholar, and the Web of Science. It might occur that some papers are not accessible. In this case other databases or the digital library of the University of Twente will be used. In the fourth and last step of the stage 'define' a formulation of the variously possible search terms will be made. The main search will be "Social media AND implementation". The literature that will be found on this search terms will form a base for further search terms. Furthermore search terms will be added for the research sub questions. Hereby cross-references and other previous found literature will be used, to make sure there is no important literature lost in the process. The search terms will be: "Social media AND future", "Social media AND framework", "Social media AND traditional marketing", whereby due to the search terms Google will be used to find other literature as well. In previous papers of the author, literature in the field of this topic has been used as well. These research papers will be used if these research papers are found to be useful. "Social media AND definition" will also be added as well as "Social media AND strategy". It is important to state that while the research progresses over time, new search terms can be added. This is due to the fact the researcher will gain more knowledge over time, and might find new search terms to find new useful articles.

The key papers of this research are; Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), Wolfswinkel et al. (2013), Effing and Spil (2016), Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), Ogbuji and Papazafeiropoulou (2016), Mangold and Faulds (2009), Moghrabi and Al-Mohammed (2016), Culnan et al. (2010), Kietzmann et al. (2011), Hanna et al. (2011), Miles et al. (2013) and Mintzberg et al. (2003).

## 2.2 Definition of Social Media and its strategy

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), the idea behind social media is far from groundbreaking. Nevertheless, there seems to be confusion amongst managers and academic researchers as to what exactly should be included under the term social media, and how it differs from the seemingly interchangeable related concepts of web 2.0 and user generated content. It all started when Bruce and Susan Abelson founded "Open Diary", a social networking site, which brought online diary writers together into one community. The growing availability of high-speed Internet access further added to the popularity of the concept, leading to the creating of social networking sites such as MySpace (2003) and Facebook (2004). This coined the term "social media", and contributed to the prominence it has today. Within the general definition of social media, there are various types that need to be distinguished further. Although most people would probably agree that Wikipedia, Youtube, Facebook and Second Life are all part of this large group, there is no systematic way whereby different social media applications can be categorized. New sites appear in cyberspace every day, so it is important that any classification scheme also takes new applications into account.

Obar and Wildman (2015) define social media as follows: "while the Internet and the World Wide Web have always been used to facilitate social interaction, the emergence and rapid diffusion of Web 2.0 functionalities during the first decade of the new millennium enabled an evolutionary leap forward in the social component of web use. This and falling costs for online data storage made it feasible for the first time to offer masses of Internet users access to an array of user-centric spaces they could populate with user-generated content, along with a correspondingly diverse set of opportunities for linking these spaces together to form virtual social networks". Tapping latent demands, social media services quickly emerged as both business and social phenomena. The multitude of stand-alone and built-in social media products and services makes "defining the technology" a challenge. (Obar, Zube & Lampe, 2012). What are social media? One might consider the answer to be straightforward. Facebook and Twitter are social media – we seem to encounter their icons everywhere we turn, beckoning us to join the supposed online revolution. While Facebook and Twitter are perhaps two of the primary social media platforms, does social media end with these two services? Certainly not. Teens appear to increasingly prefer social media services like Instagram, Snapchat and Yik Yak where their parents aren't as likely to be users. (Arce, 11 oct 2015; Moss, 9 jan 2015) Does this suggest that the primary networks are moving targets? What are the secondary networks? Is YouTube social media? Wikipedia? Amazon.com? Newyorktimes.com? According to the author, YouTube and Wikipedia can be considered social media based on the definition found. Amazon is not, and Newyorktimes.com is missing the 'social' aspect. The following two distinct challenges associated with the conceptualization of social media: (1) the speed at which the technology is expanding and evolving challenges our ability to define clear-cut boundaries around the concept. Social media technologies include a wide range of PC and mobile-based platforms that continue to be developed launched re-launched, abandoned and ignored every day in countries throughout the world and at varying levels of public awareness. (2) social media services facilitate various forms of communication that are similar to those enabled by other technologies. If social media brings people together, facilitate collaboration and communication, should the telephone be considered social media?

Boyd and Ellison (2008), define social networks sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. While Boyd and Ellison (2008) use the term "social network site" to describe this phenomenon, the term "social networking sites" (SNS) also appears in public discourse, and the two terms are often used interchangeably. They chose not to employ the term "networking" for two reasons: emphasis and scope. "networking" emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Therefore, this can be seen as a definition of social media, but in this research used as "social networking". Some authors may call social media social networking sites or vise versa. While social networking sites have implemented a wide variety of technical features, their backbone consists of visible profiles that display an articulated list of friends, who are also users of the system.

First of all it is important to notice that there is a lack of common understanding regarding the definition of a 'strategy' among authors in literature. In addition, there is no clear understanding in literature what social media is. This results in that there are almost no definitions regarding a 'social media strategy' in literature. Lardi and Fuchs (2013) try to define this definition. However, this explanation is more focused on the difference between a 'social media marketing strategy' and a 'social media strategy'. According to Lardi and Fuchs (2013), many companies understand the expression 'social media strategy' as synonymous with 'social media marketing strategy'. However, there are some differences, and it is important to understand these differences in order to better use social media for business benefits. A marketing strategy might use social media as a marketing tool for targeting customers and promoting brands, products or services. A social media strategy, as understood in the book of Lardi and Fuchs (2013), takes a more holistic view, looking across the business value chain to identify areas where social media could contribute to business goals or address challenges. Differences are for example the scope of the social media strategy being organization wide, while social media marketing strategy is more customer centric. Due to the lack of a social media strategy definition, a light will be shed on the definition of a strategy in chapter 2.5.

## 2.3 The business opportunities and challenges of social media

According to Moghrabi and Al-Mohammed (2016), social media has seized a considerable share of everyday life activities, especially due to the multitude of purposes of social media activities. Therefore, it only makes sense that companies and businesses would decide to take advantage of the benefits offered by social media, and integrate social media within their organizations in order to help them achieve their strategic goals and objectives. Social media had the power to transform organization's business model from operations, marketing and not ending with sales. Whether they were small businesses or big operating companies, many businesses nowadays cannot operate without the aid of social networking sites. Social networking sites are different from traditional online marketing channels because they have the ability to gather, parse, and sort valuable demographic data, on daily basis. From a business perspective, integrating social media inside of a business and aligning it with an organization's strategies and goals has turned out to be less of an alternative, and even more a need in today's aggressive and dynamic business environment. The reason is that organizations must recognize the demands of the global competitive business environment and respond promptly in addition to ensuring that they predict trends in those environments. By embracing online social networking, and building up a culture of client centricity supported by the use of social networking channels, organizations can develop a competitive advantage. Social media has forced companies to change their infrastructure, influence their strategies and transform their objectives to include a social media specific target. As examples: obtaining one million followers online, creation of dedicated social media teams, a dedicated budget, and minimizing the volume of poor comments which may reflect negatively on the organization's image. Using business intelligence and social-media analytics, engaging-content strategy can be formed to monitor interactions that take place within it and detect trends to improve decision-making. According to Qualman (2010), social media allows dissatisfied customers to post their complaints right away, in the height of their frustration. This gives companies a unique opportunity to gain authentic insight into the problems that customers are facing when using their product or service. These comments are incredibly easy to find on social media outlets; the organization simply needs to search for their company's name and then read through the resulting comments and pages for negative mentions of their brand. Companies should value this critical feedback and use it to improve their products and services while connecting with dissatisfied customers to solve the issues they are faced with. According to Jiang et al. (2016), from a business perspective, social media can be used in various ways to improve operations and enhance an organizations business profile. According to Weisgerber and Butler (2011) social media has enabled organizations to gain exposure to the needs, opinions and desires of a wider audience and also provide an opportunity for connecting with a highly targeted population that could be potential customers to the organization. From the organizations' perspective social media creates a better communication process between customers, stakeholders and the organization itself, which leads to the start of an innovative process in the organization (Lehmkuhl, Baumol and Jung, 2013).

According to Moghrabi and Al-Mohammed (2016), social media has transformed the business world, from bridging the gap with the customers, to higher marketing cost savings, to better damage control, to higher customer satisfaction, to greater lead generation, among many others. Moreover, social media although available to all organizations, can create a competitive advantage for the organizations that know how to best utilize it, and this competitive advantage is the fine line between success and failure in today's highly competitive business environment. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media allows firms to engage timely and direct to end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and where higher levels of efficiency can be achieved in comparison with more traditional communication tools. This makes social media not only relevant for large multinational firms, but also for small and medium sized companies, and even nonprofit and governmental agencies. Using social media is not an easy task and may require new ways of thinking, but the potential gains are far from being negligible. Furthermore, according to Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011), anecdotal evidence from market research reports suggests that firms use social media, to build direct relationships with customers, increase traffic to their website, identify new business opportunities, create communities, distribute content, collect feedback from customers, and generally to support their brand (Breslauer & Smith 2009; eMarketer 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social networking sites are particularly suited for collecting information from customers, initiating two-way converstations with customers and developing relationships with customers through communication interaction.

Regarding the challenges of social media one must consider that being a new technology, SNS may not be particularly attractive to Business-to-Business (B2B) companies. Previous literature highlights barriers, both internal and external, to the adoption of new technologies by B2B oganizations (Buehrer, Senecal and Pullins (2005). Indeed many organizations have been slow to adopt new technologies due to perceived barriers such as lack of money, time and training, negative views about usefulness, as well as unfamiliarity with the particular technology. According to Berthon, Pitt, Plangger and Shapiro (2012), the new global marketing environment is littered with success and disaster stories for many well-known brands. However, all tend to have one thing in common: the shift in power away from the firm towards individuals and communities. Although firms are not the sole creators of value they once were, some astute companies are leveraging social media to good marketing effect. For example, Procter & Gamble's Old Spice brand. This veteran brand was almost certainly in the decline phase of its product lifecycle when an ad was created featuring NFL star Isaiah Mustafa as the 'Old Spice Guy'. The ad won the Golden Lion award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2010, but the real success came from its posting on YouTube with millions of downloads, very successful humorous tweets on Twitter, and the creation of a hugely popular fan page on Facebook. The sales of Old Spice increased by 55% between April and June 2010 (Pitt et al., 2012). Previous research has shown that most companies randomly establish a presence on social media while others avoid these platforms altogether because of unknown risk and lack of understanding of the social media environment (Lardi & Fuchs, 2013). According to Ogbuiji and Papazafeiropoulou (2016), establishing a presence on several social media platforms without a strategically defined approach does pose some risks to companies. Nevertheless, during the adoption process of social media, companies use up time, human resource, efforts, technology and skills, these parameters need to be put into consideration so the return on investment

can be measured accurately. Due to the lack of proper implementation, these risks, combined with partly exploitation of the full benefits social media has to offer, this is the biggest challenge for companies. According to Berthon et al., (2012), the 21st century has brought both opportunities and challenges in this global world. Marketing managers face a dynamic and interconnected international environment. As such, they have to consider the many opportunities and threats that Web 2.0, social media and creative consumers present, marketing managers needs to learn to work within the resulting perspective shifts in loci of activity, power, and value. According to Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), it is also important to recognize that social media has properties which at least, to date, empower consumers and give them influence, enabling relationship building between organizations and individuals. Besides relationship building this can also be a risk for companies, since the power of individuals can also be negative. For example, Dave Carroll's United Breaks Guitars video went viral on YouTube, making the fledgling singer an overnight sensation while simultaneously vilifying United Airlines, which refused to pay for the repairs to his damaged guitar. Millions of people have viewed the decidedly negative take on the United brand. Carroll's reaction is hardly unique; the list of examples is endless. But it is not just cranky customers who can use readily available, powerful, hyper connected technologies to make an impact. Employees can too (Bernoff & Schadler, 2010). According to Mangolds and Faulds (2009), social media has amplified the power of consumer-to-consumer conversations in the marketplace by enabling one person to communicate with literally hundreds of thousands other consumers quickly and with relatively little effort. Managers cannot directly control these conversations.

The advantages of social media are far from negligible, but due to the lack of proper implementation of social media strategies, the shift of power from traditional marketing to more influence from the customer, can cause harm to the business brand. Therefore, mindful and proper adoption of social media is highly important for companies who want to use social media for business purposes. Things as thoughtful implementation, recognition from managers regarding the power and critical nature of the discussions being carried on by consumers on social media, metrics to measure return on investment and strategies are highly critical for the degree of how successful social media is for companies' business objectives.

## 2.4 The importance of social media marketing compared to traditional marketing

In the literature among different researchers there a lot similarities regarding the importance of social media marketing compared to traditional marketing. According to Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden (2011), companies should view their approach to social media as an integrated strategy that brings consumer experiences to the forefront, all whilst recognizing that internet-based media does not replace traditional media. Internet-based media expands marketing's ability to move consumers from awareness to engagement, consideration, loyalty and advocacy. While the use of traditional media constitutes a trade-off between reach and consumer engagement, social media enables both reach and engagement through judicious use of all formats and platforms. Marketers need both people and community platforms in order to create experiences that achieve the overarching goal of attention and influence. Social media platforms have been revolutionizing the state of marketing, advertising and promotions. Social media has transformed the Internet from a platform for information, to a platform of influence. Due to this transformation, social media marketing is now seen as a mandatory element of their marketing strategy for companies of all sizes from different industries. However, it is not longer enough to merely incorporate social media as standalone elements of a marketing plan. Companies need to consider both social and traditional media as apart of an ecosystem whereby all elements work together towards a common objective. According to Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), organizations both large and small have jumped on the social media bandwagon. However, given the frequent demand by management for 'proof' of return on investment (ROI), it appears that there is a fair degree of uncertainty with respect to allocating marketing effort and budget to social media. According to Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), social media is neither a perfect substitute for traditional marketing, nor is it one-size-fits-all. Marketers can effectively use social media by taking their message directly to consumers and focusing on traditional objectives. In this process, they should recognize distinctions in elements of the social media mix and act in accordance with marketing objectives. It is also important to recognize that social media has properties which at least, to date, empower consumers and give them influence, enabling relationship building between organizations and individuals. Furthermore it is important to integrate a social and traditional media plan for the relationship of both. This is due to the fact that in the eyes of the customers they are part of the same: your corporate image. According to Moghrabi and Al-Mohammed (2016), many businesses nowadays cannot operate without the aid of social networking accounts. In fact social media is now dramatically affecting traditional business-to-customer models as well as business-to-business models. Social networks are different from the traditional online marketing-channels because they have the ability to gather, parse, and sort valuable demographic data, on daily basis. Social networking includes a variety of services, evolutions and communications that happen in the cyberspace. Furthermore according to Moghrabi and Al-Mohammed (2016), social media is not to be employed as a replacement to traditional media but should rather be used as a supplement to it. Though large is the reach of social media, it does not reach all customer segments, as some segments are still loyal to traditional, so it is recommended to utilize them concurrently. This especially applies to the older generations. Despite the current emphasis placed on social media platforms by some organizations, it should be emphasized that this does not take away the importance of traditional face-to-face interaction, as that is equally important. As such, a balance must be formulated between the organizations "intangible" social media persona, and the organizations "tangible" real life persona. Besides this, social media networks have proven to be a useful tool in investment and entrepreneurship. This has created a considerable impact on the entrepreneurships worldwide in relation to social media as an effective marketing tool. These effects can be seen in relation to its effect on cost, organization, objectives and marketing strategies. Strategies have evolved to include business networks-related goals and rules. Social marketing is seen to be the future of marketing. This can be determined from the rate at which it is being embraced in the corporate world and the importance accorded to it. Its popularity is rising fast such that there are social media marketing companies on the rise. However, it is imperative to note that the success of any social media-marketing project is based on proper planning and evaluation of the target market. Social media has, today, become a parcel of the business ecosystem,

rather than a separate isolated entity. Businesses need to integrate social networking with their business processes. Social networking can fundamentally help change the business. Social media offers interaction over the web as it offers content that is user-generated. Through the social media, a modern cultural infrastructure is formulated, which is more responsive to customer behaviors. This interaction has become very interlinked with organizational processes, leading to Enterprise Social Marketing (EPM). Social media and EPM allow for authenticity, increased granularity, improved responsiveness, value creation, proper targeting, analytic and flexibility.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) argue that social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix, because in a traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a nontraditional sense it enables customers to talk directly to one another. The content, timing and frequency of the social media-based conversations occurring between consumers are outside managers' direct control. This stands in contrast to the traditional integrated marketing communications paradigm whereby a high degree of control is present. The 21st century is witnessing an explosion of internet-based messages transmitted through these media. They have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation. Unfortunately, the popular business press and academic literature offers marketing managers very little guidance for incorporating social media into their IMC strategies. Therefore, many managers lack a full appreciation for social media's role in the company's promotional efforts. Mangold and Faulds (2009) propose that social media be considered a hybrid component of the promotional mix and therefore be incorporated as an integral part of the organization's IMC strategy. In the traditional communications paradigm, the elements of the promotional mix are coordinated to develop an IMC strategy, and the content, frequency, timing and medium of communications are dictated by the organization in collaboration with its paid agents (advertising agencies, marketing research firms, and public relations consultants). The flow of information outside the boundaries of the paradigm has generally been confined to face-to-face, word-of-mouth communications among individual consumers, which has had minimal impact on the dynamics of the marketplace due to its limited dissemination (Mayzlin, 2006). However, in the era of social media, marketing managers' control over the content, timing and frequency of information is being severely eroded. In the new communications paradigm (see figure 2), marketing managers should recognize the power and critical nature of the discussions being carried on by consumers using social media. The following trends have severely diminished the usefulness and practicality of the traditional communications paradigm as a framework for developing IMC strategies. (1) Consumers are turning away from the traditional sources of advertising: radio, television, magazines, and newspapers. Consumers also consistently demand more control over their media consumption. They require on-demand and immediate access to information at their own convenience (Rashtchy et al., 2007; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). (2) Consumers are turning more frequently to various types of social media to conduct their information searches and to make their purchasing decisions (Lempert, 2006; Vollmer & precourt, 2008). (3) Social media is perceived by consumers as a more trustworthy source of information regarding products and services than corporate-sponsored communications transmitted via the traditional elements of the promotion mix (Foux, 2006). The new communications paradigm, on the other hand, requires several important changes in management's attitudes and assumptions about IMC strategy formulation. First, marketing managers must accept the reality that a vast amount of information about their products and services is being communicated by individual consumers to other consumers via social media. Second, consumers are responding to this information in ways that directly influence all aspects of consumer behavior, from information acquisition to post-purchase expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Third, consumers are turning away from the traditional elements of the promotion mix; in particular, they are reducing their reliance on advertising as a source of information to guide their purchase decision-making. Finally, managers who are accustomed to exerting a high level of control over company-to-consumers messages must learn to talk with their customers, as opposed to talking at them, therefore influencing the discussions taking place in the social space. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), it is important to use both traditional and internet-based promotional tools to engage customers.

**Figure 2. The new communications paradigm (Mangold and Faulds (2009)**



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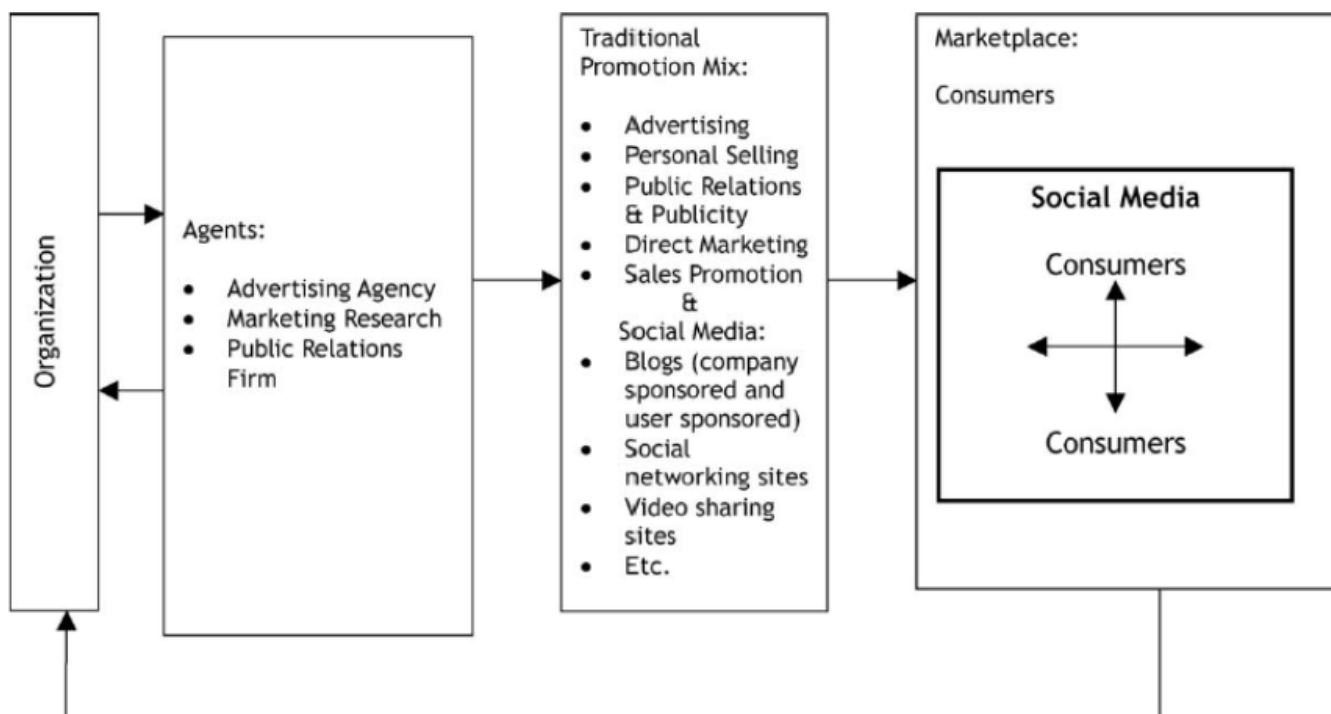
## 2.5 Planned versus emergent strategies

Due to the fact there is no definition of a social media strategy in literature, a light will be shed on the definition strategy. Therefore, a light will be shed on the definition 'strategy'. First of all it is important to notice that there is a lack of common understanding regarding the definition of a 'strategy' among authors in literature. Two definitions of the leading authors in this topic will be discussed and used in this research. The two leading authors in this field of research are: Mintzberg (2003) and porter (1996). According to Mintzberg (1985), the definition of a strategy is as follows: 'a pattern in a stream of decisions'. Emergent strategy expresses the idea that people have a broad long-term vision, and take only small steps towards it. Porter (1996) is talking about defining a 'competitive strategy'. This is still useful due to the competitive advantage companies try to achieve. Porter argues that competitive strategy is about being different. According to Porter (1996) a competitive strategy means: "deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value". In an earlier attempt (1980) porter defined a strategy as "a broad formula for how a business is going to compete, what its goals should be, and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals. It is a combination of the ends (goals) for which the firm is striving and the means (policies) by which it is seeking to get there." There are many other definitions found in the literature. However, it is clear that there is no general understanding of the definition and it seems rather broad formula.

According to Mintzberg et al. (2003), one theory is that managers develop strategy consciously, and that they follow a consciously planned Information System (IS) strategy. An alternative view is that strategies only partially reflect stated intentions. According to Mintzberg (1985), the definition of a strategy is as follows: 'a pattern in a stream of decisions'. Some strategies that managers intend are not implemented: the unrealized strategies. Other strategies are realized, but were unintended and followed from the cumulative effect of successive day-to-day decisions. So realized strategies combine formal plans and unplanned events. Emergent strategy expresses the idea that people have a broad long-term vision, and take only small steps towards it. They leave space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, and for participation. Since developing IS strategy is an uncertain process the emergent strategy style will often be more realistic and satisfactory than the planning style. This is especially true in relation to online business where both technology and competition change so rapidly. Google has a long-term vision, but moves towards that not by detailed planning, but by responding quickly to new opportunities, such as the decision to acquire YouTube. Some aspects of Google's strategy, such as building new software development facilities around the world, require detailed planning. Realised strategy combines both planned and emergent actions.
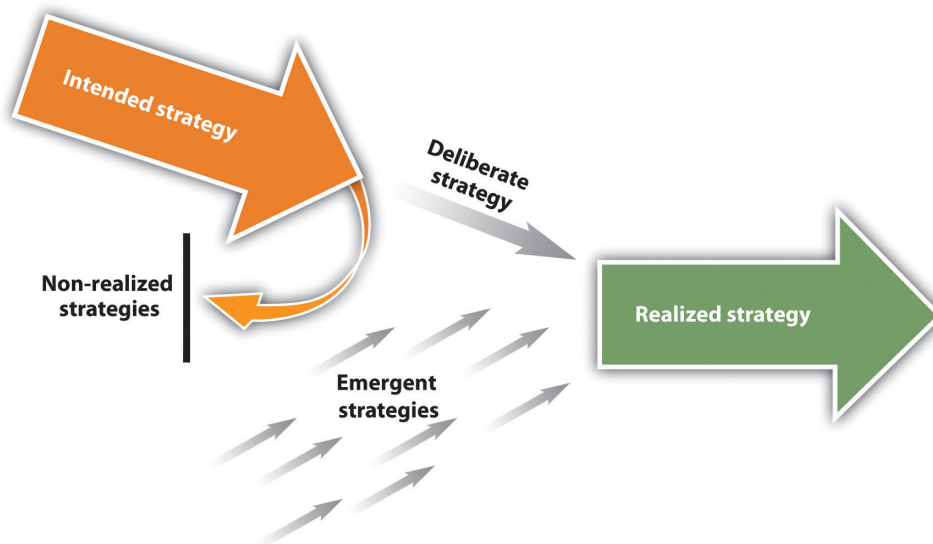


**Figure 3. Deliberate versus Emergent strategies (Mintzberg et al. 2003)**

Decisions in relation to information systems and information strategies also have emergent characteristics. Research by Boonstra (2003) indicated five issues affecting how managers make IS decisions:

- Whether or not there is scope to design a solution;
- Whether distinct alternatives have to be searched for or not;
- The urgency and necessity of the decision
- Whether or not it can be subdivided to allow a more gradual process
- The number and power of stakeholders involved

We use terms like 'strategy', 'strategic advantage' or 'the strategic use of IS' to describe the broad choices facing companies concerning which product to offer and which markets to target. These decisions are fundamental for their success. Competitive advantage is what a company seeks to gain from the way it positions a product or service in relation to competitors. This may emphasize, for example:

- The needs of specific customers (a niche market);
- A wide distribution network;
- A unique product in terms of price (cost leadership) or quality (differentiation).

In addition it is interesting to refute the alternative theory of Mintzberg et al. (2003) as described above, compared to the Theory of Diffusion of Innovations of Everett Rogers (2003). First of all according to Rogers (1983), an innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. It matters little, so far as human behavior is concerned, whether or not an idea is "objectively" new as measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery. The perceived newness of the idea for the individual determines his or her reaction to it. If the idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation. The "newness" aspect of an innovation may be expressed in terms of knowledge, persuasion, or a decision to adopt. Furthermore, the author states that a technology is a design for instrumental action that reduces the uncertainty in the cause-effect relationships involved in achieving a desired outcome. A technology usually has two components: (1) a hardware aspect, and (2) a software aspect. Therefore, social media can be considered a technological innovation. The Theory of Diffusion of Innovations illustrates that innovations go through a distinct lifecycle comprised of four stages: early adoption, rapid growth, maturity and decline. At some point during the maturity stage, which Rogers refers to as "discontinuity", a new innovation initiates an entirely new lifecycle within that given market, or if this is not the case it will decline even further. While the new innovation initially gains only a small degree of traction in the market (i.e. as with early adopters), it eventually experiences its breakthrough, with rapid growth that quickly displaces the previous innovation, thus becoming the new status quo.[2] This is important for the decision of a possible 'adoption' of a social media platform. Furthermore, looking at the usage of social media among U.S. adults as described in section 1.2, the innovation is at its maturity phase. The current saturation of the users suggests that the innovation is at a plateau. Therefore, to sustain its importance regarding business purposes, it will need a new innovation or it will eventually lose its importance due to the fast shifting technology. As described in chapter 1 it shows that current social media sites have a maturity phase and might decline in the near future. Due the probability of a new innovation as described by Rogers (2003), it might not be a good idea to have completely planned strategy as described by Mintzberg et al. (2003).

**Figure 4. Discontinuity brought on by disruption and "jumping" curve. [2]**
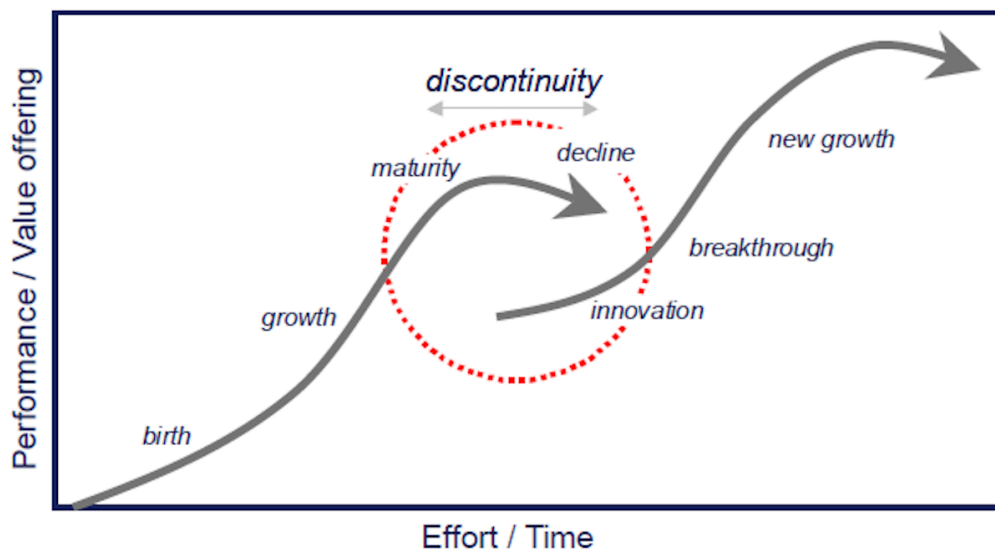


## 2.6 Social media frameworks

In recent literature Effing and Spil (2016), developed a social media framework for social media strategies, which provides key factors for a social media strategy. According to Ogbuji and Papazafeiropoulou (2016), there is few social media strategy that concentrates on different aspects of social media. One of those frameworks is the Framework of Effing and Spil (2016). The authors found all key elements of social media strategies as found in the literature, and after analysis they defined three overarching concepts that comprise the elements: Enable, Engage and Evaluate. The first concept 'enable' is about preparing and setting up social media activities and campaigns. The category enable has the following aspects: resources, policies resources, policies employees/consultants, development, policies, partners' staff investment and guidelines employees'

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[2]     Retrieved from: https://gongos.com/tl/how-disruptions-are-born-and-how-it-applies-to-the-market-research-discipline/ (06.02.14, by Greg Heist).

technology. It is important with all aspects that the company clearly defines the responsibilities of all the social media members involved in the process of the social media control of the firm. Several authors agree that in order to successfully deploy social media, companies need to provide specific training and education for the employees allocated to the social media task. Resources include the financial part, namely the budget for implementing such a strategy with all related technological expenses such as Facebook Ads and tool subscriptions, as well as the allocation of the dedicated time and staff. In the present paper resources contain expertise or training that is needed, quality control of massages and necessary technology. The second concept is 'engage'. This concept comprises of all those aspects and key elements of social media strategy about reaching out, getting attention of certain target audiences and interacting with them. For a successful social media presence, it is moreover essential to define your target audience in your social media strategy. In order to design the social media presence in a way that different types of customers are addressed, it is important to reconsider different group characteristics. 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. Goals build the basis for a social media strategy, whereby it is important that these goals are measurable. This needs to be done so that the strategy can be evaluated and constantly adapted if necessary. Various authors point out that the content published on social media is one of the core elements of a strategy. The social media content should fit the company culture and should be of significant quality. Furthermore it is important that organizations see the relation with their social media users as a friendship based on trust. Aggressive advertising and other disturbing activities may lead to a lower engagement of users. An action plan for a social media strategy can imply the creation of a schedule for corporate posts. 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. The third concept 'evaluate' comprises of various ways of using data, statistics and insights to learn, adapt and measure whether the company's activities on social media are delivering desired effects. The literature largely agrees on the importance of monitoring the social media activities for a successful social media strategy. Several authors agree that listening to their audience is an essential part of operating social media strategically. With listening to the customer's voice, the organizations are more likely to gain insights into their preferences and needs. Companies that fail to carefully monitor their social media channels lose a significant amount of valuable insights from the market. The process of monitoring can be done with the aid of available monitoring tools. Evaluation of return is the final important aspect of social media as indicated in the literature. Organizations have two possibilities to measure the success of social media use, namely key performance indicators and financial returns. Performance indications could include simple metrics such as likes, shares, retweets or followers, whereas financial returns focus on pure monetary gains. To measure return, there could be measurable indicators such as increase in website traffic, customer satisfaction and so on. There are more frameworks in the literature, only in this research paper the most useful frameworks have been described here, which are also cited in high numbers or the relevance is of such high value, it cannot be missed in this research paper.

**Figure 5. Social media strategy Canvas (Effing and Spil, 2016)**



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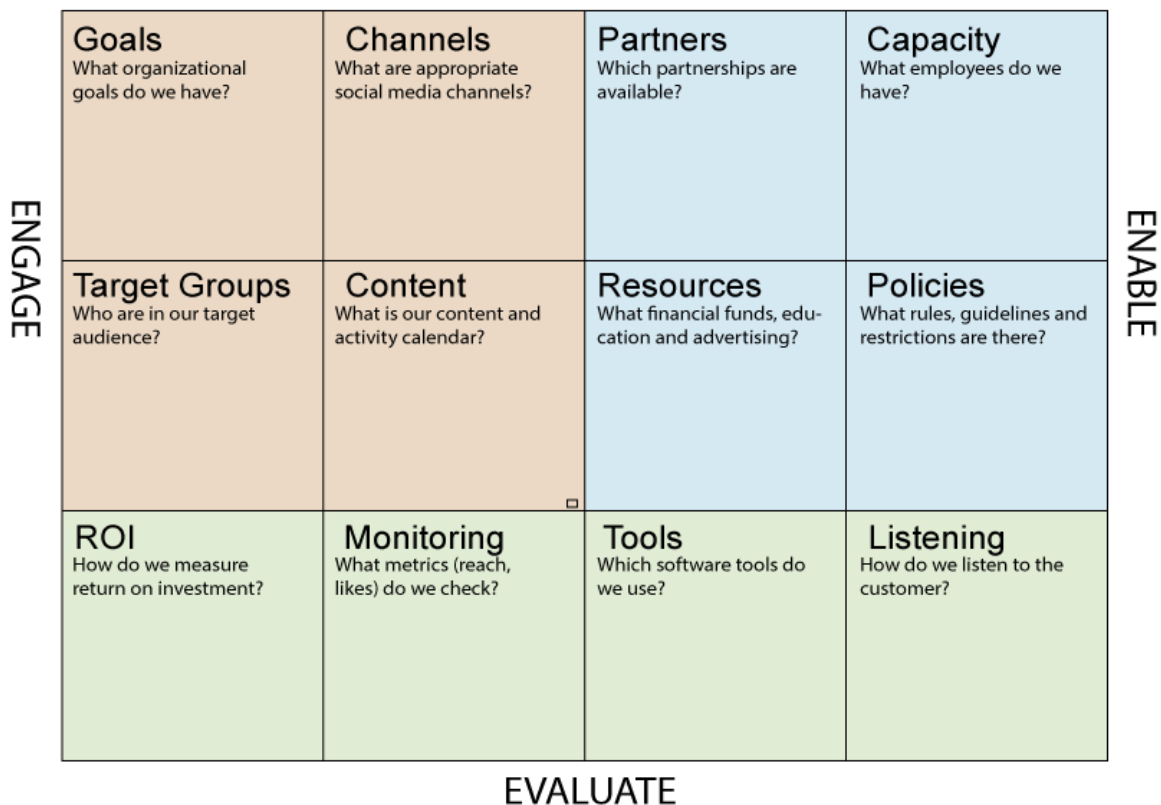
Another framework is the framework of Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011). The framework of Kietzmann et al. (2011) is a honeycomb of seven function building blocks. (1) Identity: this building block represents the extent to which users reveal their identities in a social media setting. This can include disclosing information such as name, age, gender, profession, location and also information that portrays users in certain ways. (2) Converstations: the conversations block of the framework represents the extent to which users communicate with other users in a social media setting. Many social media sites are designed primarily to facilitate conversations among individuals and groups. (3) Sharing: this building block represents the extent to which users exchange, distribute and receive content. The term 'social' often implies that exchanges between people are crucial. In many cases, however, sociality is about the objects that mediate these ties between people. (4) Presence: this building block represents the extent to which users can know if other users are accessible. It includes knowing where others are, in the virtual world and/or in the real world, and whether they are available. (5) Relationship is the fifth building block that represents the extent to which users can be related to other users. By 'relate' they mean that two or more users have some form of association that leads them to converse, share objects of sociality, meet up, or simply just list each other as a friend of fan. (6) Another building block is the extent to which users can identify the standing of others, including themselves, in a social media setting. Reputation can have different meanings on social media platforms. In most cases, reputation is a matter of trust, but since information technologies are not yet good at determining such highly qualitative criteria, social media sites rely on 'mechanical Turks': tools that automatically aggregate user-generated information to determine trustworthiness. (7) Groups functional block represents the extent to which users can form communities and sub-communities.

The more 'social' a network becomes, the bigger the group of friends, followers and contacts. Furthermore according to Kietzmann et al. (2011), it is important to recognize the 4 C's. The first C is 'cognize'. A firm should first recognize and understand its social media landscape by using the honeycomb framework. This will unveil the social media functionality and engagement implications for understanding your customers. The second C stands for 'congruity'. A firm needs to develop strategies that are congruent with, or suited to, different social media functionalities and the goals of the firm. This involves focusing on the core honeycomb blocks of social media activity that will facilitate the needs of its business. The third C stands for 'curate'. A firm must act as a curator of social media interactions and content. This involves developing a clear understanding of how often and when a firm should chime into conversations on a social media platform, and who will represent the firm online. The fourth C stands for 'chase'. A constant chase for information about social media activity is tremendously time-consuming. Yet, firms must scan their environments in order to understand the velocity of conversations and other information flows that could affect current or future position in the market. The honeycomb framework provides a valuable tool for evaluating the changing social media ecology. The social media strategy framework, which has been developed by Lardi and Fuchs (2013), is developed to help executives approach the topic of how to use social media for business purposes. It provides a step-by-step guide to help companies make an informed decision on the use of social media by prompting key questions. The framework includes a one-time planning effort with periodic reviews to incorporate the dynamic nature of social media. It also takes into account the company's specific market, industry, culture and ability to support new technology. The framework consists of two main phases: Phase 1 'Develop Strategy' and Phase 2 'Plan & Deliver'. Phase 1 encourages companies to think about 'why' they should adopt social media, before diving into actual actions. Phase 2 splits into separate approaches, depending on whether engagement in social media is intended for internal or external target audiences. Enterprise collaboration focuses on internal interactions, for example, knowledge sharing, innovating, content creation and reuse, communication and employee training. Conversely, Business 2.0 focuses on external interactions, for example, marketing, customer relations, brand and eminence as well as talent acquisition – for prospects, clients, partners, analysts, marketers and job candidates.

The frameworks as described above are all different, yet all frameworks have overarched elements or same elements, which are the same, yet described in different words. The 'Develop Strategy' from Lardi and Fuchs (2013), are quite the same as the 'Engage' concept as described by Spil and Effing (2016). The Framework of Kietzmann et al. (2011) is different from the Frameworks of Spil and Effing (2016) and Kietzmann et al. (2011). The Framework of Kietzmann et al. (2011), is a honeycomb of seven building blocks whereby it is mainly focused on to a certain extent a user uses social media. This should serve as a tool to understand social media, whereas later the 4C's (cognize, congruity, curate and chase) have overarching elements with the other frameworks, the activation from the companies' part to actually achieve a successful social media platform. Due to the fact that the framework of Effing and Spil (2016) is an agglutination of all key factors for a successful social media strategy found in recent literature, this framework will be the leading framework used to derive key factors from, and will be used as a research tool to investigate how social media strategies are implemented at organizations. According to Ogbuji and Papazafeiropoulou (2016), companies are challenged everyday as they face an environment where the adoption rate of social media has massively increased by customers and employees. However, companies face tremendous pressure to create a presence on various platforms as expected by customers. For this reason, they are struggling to implement social media strategically in their business for it is not enough to just create a presence but to use it systematically and enjoy its benefits. In the literature there is no common understanding among authors regarding the implementation of social media. A lot of different factors are mentioned for a successful implementation of social media.

## 2.7 Social media implementation

To successfully implement social media with other strategies within a firm, there must be a guideline for the implementation of social media. According to Culnan, Mchugh and Zubillaga (2010), social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook enable the creation of virtual customer environments (VCEs), where online communities of interest form around specific firms, brands or products. While these platforms can be used as another means to deliver familiar e-commerce applications, when firms fail to fully engage their customers, they also fail to fully exploit the capabilities of social media platforms. To gain business value, organizations need to incorporate community building as part of implementation of social media. According to Hanna et al. (2011), most marketing plans include the now mandatory elements of YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, few of today's marketers operate within a systematic approach to understanding and managing their company's social strategy. According to Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), there are several important qualities among of them authenticity, being conversational and 'human' reciprocity, ceding at least some control, and fighting the urge to explicitly and constantly close a sale. According to Moghrabi and Al-Mohammed (2016), social media is often used to mislead customers through unrealistic advertisements, false promises, buying followers, while it should be the case that the quality of, rather than the quantity, of customers is what needs to be quantified. Furthermore it is important that social media is a cost saving tool, and organizations should not make it a costly platform through excessive and exaggerated pricing for online promotions and campaigns. Besides this, organizations should avoid taking advantage of the free nature of social media and abuse it by excessive overload postings.

According to Culnan et al. (2010), firms potentially gain value from VCEs when customers engage with the company on a regular basis, co-creating content and sharing power. If these relationships are successful, customers feel like company insiders, often serving as a champion for the company and its products. Simply creating a presence on a popular platform like Facebook does not guarantee that customers will be attracted to a firm's page and engage with the firm and other customers. Relationships serve as the foundation for VCEs, so organizations need a new approach to implementing social media if they are to gain value from these communities. Specifically because use of social media by customers is voluntary, and communities result from interactions among members over time, organizations need to take explicit steps to build communities and to learn from the interactions. These actions may not be necessary for other types of application where use of a system is either a required part of an employee's job or the success of an application does not depend on users developing social relationships with other users. Merely using social media to support e-commerce without engaging customers does not fully exploit the capabilities of these platforms. Thus the authors defined two essential characteristics of an effective implementation. (1) The firm attracts a critical mass of participants who form a community and who engage with the firm or other community members on an ongoing basis. (2) The firm develops processes to benefit from the content created by its customers. Furthermore the authors argue that to gain value from social media used for customer applications, firms need to develop implementation strategies based on three elements: mindful adoption, community building and absorptive capacity. First, organizations need to make a "mindful decision" regarding initial adoption. Subsequently, because social media are essentially communications systems, organizations need to build communities. Finally, they need to develop absorptive capacity so they can learn from the content their customers generate. The research paper of Culnan et al. (2010), will serve as a research tool for this research paper. According to Culnan et al. (2010), as mentioned above consists of the following overarching aspects **mindful adoption decisions, community building and absorptive capacity.** These aspects will be described below to have a clear view of what these overarching aspects consists off. This is necessary due to the fact it is used in the interview frameworks, and has an important role within the research paper combined with the social media strategy canvas.

**Mindful adoption decisions**

First, organizations need to make a "mindful decision" regarding initial adoption. According to Culnan et al. (2010), when an IT innovation such as social media gains a high public profile, organizations can feel that they must urgently jump on the bandwagon, particularly given the ease and relatively low initial costs of rolling out some of these cloud-based applications. Such an approach does not necessarily ensure a quality implementation that yields the desired benefits unless a firm makes mindful decisions about the way the technology is adopted. In a mindful adoption, a firm pays careful attention to its local context, weighing the expected business value with the risks before deciding to proceed. Over time, the innovation is absorbed into the work life of the firm. While a mindful firm may be early in terms of evaluating innovations, it may not necessarily decide to become an early adopter or join the social bandwagon if an innovation is perceived to have dubious merit. Put another way, mindfulness means adopting the "right" innovation at the "right" time and in the "right way" way across all phases of implementation. Initial adoption includes selection, configuration, deployment and exploitation. The authors believe that mindfulness applied to social encompasses five elements: (1) making a good decision about which platform(s) to adopt and how they should be used. (2) Assigning responsibility for governance. (3) Identifying metrics to measure value. (4) Making sure all applications are readily accessible. (5) Managing risks. It is important to match the adoption of social media platforms to the organizations culture, the customers, and the business objectives. Furthermore according to Culnan et al. (2010), it is important for the mindful adoption to;

- Make applications easy to find
  - Maintain an inventory of all social media applications
  - Provide links from the firm's homepage or an accessible "community" or gateway page
  - Provide easy cross-navigation between social media applications
  - Make sure the links between social media sites or links back to the other websites work
- Develop quantitative and qualitative metrics for measuring the value of social media applications
  - Design metrics to measure community outcomes (e.g., size of community, frequency of participation, sharing of content with other social media sites)
  - Design metrics to measure traditional outcomes (e.g, revenues, cost savings, increased customer satisfaction)
- Address risk management issues, including security and privacy issues:
  - Create a formal policy for employee use of social media
  - Post a privacy notice and "house rules" for participants
  - Train employees
  - Monitor social media applications for potential problems

**Community building**

Secondly, because social media are essentially communications systems, organizations need to build communities. According to Culnan et al. (2010), it is important to build a community. Many of the most effective social media initiatives targeted at customers are communities with a critical mass of people who identify with the community and stay involved. The greater involvement an individual has with the community, the more likely he or she is to contribute. Further, over time, people develop a sense of responsibility to the community based on their exchanges with other members. The authors state that the following aspects are important for building a community:

- Continually populate the site with engaging content:
  - Assign formal responsibility for creating content
  - Have executives or other company "celebrities" pot and interact with community members
- Provide incentives for participation (e.g., recognition)
- Don't mention the company in every conversation
- Balance freedom with control and accountability; be selective in deleting content
- Be sensitive to the norms and policies of any public platforms you use

**Absorptive capacity**

Lastly, the company needs to develop absorptive capacity so they can learn from the content their customers generate. The third element according to Culnan et al. (2010) is absorptive capacity. This means they need the ability to recognize and acquire new knowledge and to subsequently be able to exploit any knowledge provided by their customers. Having a thriving community with a critical mass of active participants is necessary but not always sufficient to gain value from a VCE; organizations must also have the capacity to process or respond to the messages their customers create. Important according to the authors are the following aspects:

- Assign responsibility to designated employees or departments for monitoring social media based on the objective(s) of the social media application
- Build on your organization's existing processes and expertise in public relations, customer service, product development, or elsewhere for processing customer communications received via other media
- To structure messages, where feasible, integrate your social media applications with your existing web services (e.g., link to existing web customer support application)
- Develop new procedures for message processing as needed for:
  - Identifying and responding to both routine and urgent messages
  - Exception-handling
  - Answering messages on a timely basis
  - Integrating social media with your existing related applications
- To share knowledge across the firm, develop procedures and metrics for reporting.


Besides the framework of Culnan et al. (2010) for social media implementation, some important factors come from the 'social media guideline' of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). This is called a guideline, due to the fact it consists of ten points for an efficient use of social media. In the research of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) the authors speak about 'five points about using media' and 'five points about being social'. However, due the unclear and vague definitions regarding social media strategy, social media implementation and social media operationalization in the literature, these factors will be placed either among social media strategy or social media implementation. The ten points of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) fit the best in the social media implementation framework of Culnan et al. (2010) rather then with the social media strategy canvas (Effing & Spil, 2016). According to the authors one of the most important factors for social media implementation is the use of the right medium of social media: there are dozens, if not hundreds of social media applications, and new ones are appearing on the horizon every day. You cannot participate in them all if you still need to run your core business, especially since "being active" is one of the key requirements to success. Choosing the right medium for any given purpose depends on the target group to be reached, and the message to be communicated. In addition it is also important to ensure that all social media activities are aligned with each other among the different social media applications. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) are also stating that media plan integration and accesses for all are important factors for a proper social media strategy.

The five points of advice according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) about **using media** are:

- Choose carefully what social media applications to use, and new ones are appearing on the horizon every day. If you still need time to run your core business, you simply cannot participate in them all. Especially since "being active" is one key requirement of success.
- Pick the application or make your own
- Ensure activity alignment, whereby it is important that social media activities are all aligned with each other.
- Media plan integration. The relationship between social media and traditional media is important. Both are two different arenas, but in customers' eyes they are both part of the same. The corporate image of the company.
- Access for all. Although it might sound elementary, once the firm has decided to utilize social media applications, it is worth checking that all employees may actually access them.

The five points of advice according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) about **being social** are:

- Be active on social media. Social media is all about sharing and interaction, so ensure content is always fresh and that you engage in discussions with your customers.
- Be interesting. The first step is to listen to your customers. Find out what they would like to hear; what they would like to talk about, what they might find interesting, enjoyable and valuable. Then develop and post content that fits those expectations.
- Be humble. Do not expect to know everything, only once you have gained the necessary understanding regarding social media, start to participate.
- Be unprofessional. There's no need to spend $100.000 to the perfect MySpace Presence, or hire a personal writer to manage your corporate blog. Try to blend in with other users and don't be afraid to make mistakes.
- Be honest and respect the rules of the games. Some social media, such as Wikipedia, may not allow companies to be involved, so do not try to force your way in.

### 2.7.1 Findings of research phase and literature research

First of all it is interesting to see that there is no common understanding in the literature regarding on how the authors call their 'action plan'. There seems to be a lack in the literature regarding strategy creation and strategy implementation factors. Other authors pinpoint a couple of 'important factors' that are important for social media (strategy) implementation. Is seems that social media strategy and social media implementation serve the same purpose and some authors chose different terms to describe their 'plan'. It seems that for an efficient social media strategy implementation a combination of different frameworks and models is necessary. According to the main research papers of this research this would result in a combination of the framework and models of Culnan et al. (2010), Effing and Spil (2016), and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). The main issue seems to be that there is a lack of common understanding regarding the 'action plan'. However, some aspects mentioned by different authors are very similar to each other. The following table will show the difference in 'action plans' and the corresponding aspects:

**Table 1. Comparison of models and frameworks**

| Factors | Culnan et al. (2010) | Effing and Spil (2016) | Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Organizational goals** | | x | |
| Target groups | | x | |
| Content | x | x | |
| Social media channel | x | x | x |
| Partners | | x | |
| Capacity | x | x | |
| Resources | | x | |
| Policies | x | x | |
| Return on Investment | | x | |
| Monitoring | x (complete) | x (partly) | |
| Tools | | x | |
| Listening to customers | | x | |
| **Application ease** | x | | x |
| risk management | x | | |
| Contiually populate site | x | | x |
| Incentives participation | x | | |
| Company mentioning conversations | x | | |
| Freedom and control balance | x | | |
| Sensitive to norms | x | | |
| Responsibility assignment | x | | |
| Building on existings processes | x | | |
| Strucutre messages | x | | |
| Share knowledge across firm | x | | |
| **Activity alingment** | | | x |
| Media plan integration | x | | x |
| Access for all | | | x |
| Advice on social media posts | | | x |

- From organizational goals up and until listening to customers are aspects from Effing and Spil (2016).
- From application ease up and until share knowledge across firm are aspects from Culnan et al. (2010).
- From activity alignment up and until advice on social media posts are aspects from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).
- Aspects that are found to have a lot of similarities among authors are crossed within the same aspect.

Table 1 shows the comparison between aspects as mentioned by different 'social media plans' according to the different authors. There are some aspects that are used by different authors, although they are not always used in the same way. There is a clear difference between aspects found between social media implementation and social media strategy. In addition, it seems social media implementation is more activating, whereas the social media strategy canvas seems to be more thoughtful and questioning based. The following example will demonstrate the difference:

**Social media strategy canvas** (Effing and Spil, 2016)
**Engage –** What are appropriate social media channels? What is our content and activity calendar? What organizational goals do we have?
**Enable -** What employees do we have? What rules, guidelines and restrictions are there?
**Evaluate –** What metrics (reach, likes) do we check, how do we measure return on Investment? Which software tools do we use?

**Social media implementation framework** (Culnan et al. (2010)

**Mindful adoption –** Make applications easy to find, develop quantitative and qualitative metrics for measuring the value of social media applications, train employees, create a formal policy for employee use
**Community building –** Provide incentives for participation, continually populate the site with engaging content
**Absorptive capacity –** Assign responsibility to designated employees or departments for monitoring social media based on the objective(s) of the social media application, develop new procedures for message processing.

Both frameworks seem to have thought about the aspect 'content'. However, the different authors fill these in differently. One author is questioning what the content is or should be, while the other author activates to populate the site with engaging content. Furthermore, it seems that there is no common understanding of all aspects. In addition it seems that when both frameworks are combined there is a thoughtful, questioning and activating role. This would results in a complete plan for a social media (strategy) implementation.

One must consider that one of the challenges of social media is that it is a new technology. Therefore, social media may not be particularly attractive for Business-to-Business (B2B) companies. Previous literature highlights barriers, both internal and external, to the adoption of new technologies by B2B organizations (Buehrer, Senecal and Pullins, 2005). Due to the fact that social media applications may not be very suitable for B2B, this research focuses on the Business-to-Consumer market. Furthermore there seems to be a lack of knowledge on smaller B2C companies, compared to explicit research towards social media strategies from big companies. Furthermore it became clear there is a gap between social media strategy formulation and social media implementation in the literature.

In the research phase it became clear there is a common understanding among authors regarding the possibilities and business opportunities of social media. Due to this common understanding a lot of authors advice the use of a social media 'strategy'. One theory according to Mintzberg et al. (2003) is that managers develop strategy consciously, and that they follow a consciously planned Information Systems (IS) strategy. An alternative view of the authors is that strategies only partially reflect stated intentions. Some strategies that managers intend are not implemented: the unrealized strategies. Other strategies are realized, but were unintended and followed from the cumulative effect of successive day-to-day decisions. Therefore it is interesting to refute the first theory of the authors, and the alternative view with the data collected from semi-structured interviews. In addition, it is interesting to find out whether or not companies are using a social media strategy, and if these strategies are unintended or planned. Furthermore it is unclear in the literature whether or not companies measure ROI of social media. Therefore, it would be interesting in this research to find out if and how companies measure ROI.

There seems to be a lack of information in literature whether or not social media strategies are being used by companies. In addition, there is no clear definition in the literature what is considered to be a social media strategy, how this social media strategy is formulated, and what is realized of these strategies. Determination whether or not a social media strategy is used by a company is difficult due to the lack of a common understanding regarding the definition of social media strategy. It seems that to determine whether or not a company is using a social media strategy is not possible solely based on literature definitions. However, it is possible to determine whether or not a strategy is emergent or planned based on the definition of Mintzberg et al. (2003). "Emergent strategy expresses the idea that people have a broad long-term vision, and take only small steps towards it. They leave space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, and for participation."

## 2.8 Conceptual Framework

**Table 2. Conceptual framework**

| | |
|---|---|
| Planned strategy use | Effing and Spil (2016)<br>Mintzberg et al. (2003) |
| Emergent strategy use | Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)<br>Mintzberg et al. (2003)<br>Partly uknown (research) |
| Implementation | Culnan et al. (2010)<br>Partly Haenlein and Kaplan (2010) |
| Realized Strategy | Effing and Spil (2016)<br>Culnan et al. (2003)<br>Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)<br>Mintzberg et al. (2003) |
| Evaluation | Effing and Spil (2016)<br>Culnan et al. (2010) |

# 3. Methodology

In this chapter the ways of data analysis en data collection will be discussed. To correctly find an answer to the research questions mentioned in this research, the method of data collection and data analysis must be determined. Due to the nature of this research and the in-depth information required to answer the research question, qualitative research will be used in this research.

## 3.1 Literature research exceptions

In this paragraph the list of exceptions of research papers will be drawn up. This is necessary due to the fact some research papers used deviate from the timeframe limitations set in chapter 2.1. Therefore, the research papers that do not meet up with the pre-set timeframe limitations but are still used in the literature research need validation in order to ensure the validity and reliability of this research. The time frame for the literature was set between 2010 up and until 2017. Exceptions made: (1) an exception has been made in the search of the definition of social media strategy. There was no common understanding in literature regarding the definition 'social media strategy'. Therefore, to define this phenomenon, research papers regarding strategies have been used. The following research papers are used: Mintzberg et al. (2003) and Porter (1996). (2) The research of Mangold and Faulds (2009) is used due to the usefulness regarding the comparison of traditional marketing with social media marketing. The research has been of van den Bulte and Wuyts (2007) is also an exception due to the usefulness regarding the introduction and research phase of social media. Furthermore the research paper of Boyd and Ellison (2008) is used for the description of the term 'social media networking site', which gives information about this phenomenon. The research of Breslauer and Smith (2009) is used to show the early importance and business opportunities of social media. In addition, the research paper of Mintzberg et al. (2003), is also used for information regarding planned versus emergent strategies. Full information on how the literature research is conducted can be found in chapter 2.1. A very useful source for research papers was found in the book: the Good, the Bad, the Ugly (2016). These articles contain highly valuable information regarding different aspects for an efficient social media (strategy) and are highly recommended in this field of research.

## 3.2 Data collection

Due to the nature of the research and the in-depth information required to answer the research questions, the qualitative research method is used in this paper. The research will consist of semi-structured interviews. It is important to use semi-structured interviews (with a transcript), to enhance the reliability of this research. Semi-structured interviews are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers. The bar for this research paper has been set for four interviews. Second, the varied professional, educational and personal histories of the sample group precluded the use of standardized interview schedule (Barriball & While, 1994). The first step for the interview script is to think of proper interview questions based on the research questions of this paper. After this an interview framework and schedule will be made. After this there must be room for changes in the interview for optimization of the interview questions. After the interview the information will be processed into cases that consists a description, analysis and conclusion. The information provided by the research paper of Culnan et al. (2010), and Effing and Spil (2016) will be used as a research tool in this research paper. Furthermore the information collected from these research papers will serve as a basis for the interview framework.

## 3.3 Data analysis

In this chapter there will be discussed how the collected data will be analyzed. Due to the use of the qualitative research method, a matching data analysis method must be found. First of all the semi-structured interviews will be recorded (voice only). This makes sure that the interviews are stored, whereby the researcher can have a closer listen after the interviews are done. The researcher will process this into a text, which will be analyzed. A case study will be drawn up after this according to Yin (2014), this will consist of a case description, case analysis and a case conclusion. In addition, a cross-case analysis will be done based on some on the theory of Miles et al. (2013). A good method will be guided by the research of Miles et al. (2013), and Yin (2014). The method of Miles et al. (2013) will be explained and used in this research. According to Miles et al. (2013), there is always a flow of specific analysis tactics, that is, ways of drawing and verifying conclusions that you use during the process. Sir ken Robinson made a convincing argument: "Without data, you are just another person with an opinion." Miles et al. (2013) added: "Without verification, you are just another researcher with a hunch". Miles et al. (2013), discuss specific tactics for drawing meaning from a particular configuration of data in a display. The first tactic is noting patterns, whereby you will often note recurring patterns and themes in a certain text or initial displays that pull together many separate pieces of data. The human mind finds patterns almost intuitively; it needs no how-to advice. Important is to be able to see added evidence of the same pattern and to remain open to disconfirming evidence when it appears. Patterns need to be subjected to skepticism, your own or that of others, and to conceptual and empirical testing. The second tactic is seeing plausibility. It often happens during analysis that a conclusion is plausible, makes good sense, and "fits". This does not have to be the case, so the moral must be; trust your 'plausibility intuitions, but don't fall in love with them'. Incidentally, a somewhat trustworthier tactic involves noticing a lack of plausibility. When a conclusion does not make sense, it is a bit safer to rule it out. In qualitative research, numbers tend to get ignored. After all, the hallmark of qualitative research is that it goes beyond how much there is of something to tell us about its essential qualities. However, a lot of counting goes on in the

background when judgments of qualities are being made. When we identify a theme or a pattern, we are isolating something that (a) happens a number of times and (b) consistently happens in a specific way. The "number of times" and "consistency judgments" are based on counting. So it is important in qualitative research to know (a) that we are sometimes counting and (b) when it is a good idea to work self-consciously with frequencies and when it is not. Another method to draw meaning from data is to look what sort of relationship there is between variable A and B. People tend to think in causal terms. The risk in trying to understand relationships between two variables is jumping too rapidly to the conclusion that A "causes" B, rather than A happens to be high and B happens to be high. After this the logical predictions and the claims have to be verified. Furthermore, the relationships have to make sense: there must be a logical basis for the claim that "perceived college benefits" lead to "resource commitment". Now that the particular tactics for generating meaning are described, it is time to confront the issue of validity and trustworthiness. Qualitative analyses can be evocative, illuminating, masterful and wrong. According to Miles et al. (2013), it is important that data quality can be assessed through checking for representativeness, checking for researcher effects on the case, and vice verse. Furthermore triangulating across data sources and methods. These checks also may involve weighting the evidence, deciding which kinds of data are most trustable.

An advantage of the analysis of the interviews will be the timeframe, due to the fact there will be several meetings on different occasions with certain timeframe in between. This will give the author the possibility for case analysis to find patterns. By not relying on a single research approach and methodology, the validity and credibility of the research findings are improved (Denzin, 1978). First of all, data triangulation will be used due to the fact primary research has been conducted in the literature, whereas this will be refuted with the secondary research in the form of data analysis of conducted interviews. Furthermore theory triangulation will be conducted, whereby the method of Miles et al., (2013), which is defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) as conventional content analysis, will be used. In addition, the case study research of Yin (2014) will be used. Afterwards, to ensure triangulation on multiple aspects, direct content analysis will be performed. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the goal of a direct approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory. This is done based on the social media strategy canvas of Effing and Spil (2016) and the research paper of Culnan et al. (2010). The outcome of data from the interviews will be analyzed according to some parts of the theory of Miles et al., (2013) and Yin (2014). While direct content analysis on the collected data will refute on the theoretical framework of Effing and Spil (2016), and the research paper of Culnan et al. (2010). In this case, the cross-case analysis would contain some quantitative content analysis, focusing on the frequency of content. Three types of qualitative content analysis will be used to ensure the trustworthiness' of this research paper. In this research paper the preference goes towards case analysis and cross-case analysis, due to the qualitative nature and in-depth interviews based on a semi-structure. This is due to the fact interview based data collection relies on analytical generalization. Due to the time restraints and amount of quality interviews available in this time, statistical generalization is not possible. Therefore, to strive for analytical generalization seems the best fit for this study. A combination between Yin (2013) regarding cross-case analysis and Miles et al. (2013) will form the basis for the analysis of the case studies and cross-case analysis. Although there will be no conscious quantitative frequency, this counting will be unconscious or simplistic. There will be some frequency tables as provided in the cross-case analysis based on content instead of certain words.

Due to the fact that the framework of Effing and Spil (2016) is an agglutination of all key factors for a successful social media strategy found in recent literature, this framework will be the leading strategy framework to derive key factors from, and will be used as a research tool to investigate how social media strategies are implemented at organizations. Regarding social media implementation the research paper of Culnan et al. (2010), was most favorable for this research. This paper is used over other frameworks due to the completeness of detailed implementation factors, high amount of citations, usefulness, and being specifically 'implementation focused'. A lot of research regarding social media implementation in literature is incomplete, unclear or more strategy based compared to Culnan et al. (2010).

## 3.4 Assessing social media strategy

There seems to be a lack of information in literature whether or not social media strategies are being used by companies. However, determination whether or not a social media strategy is used by a company is difficult due to the lack of a common definition of a social media strategy. Therefore, a light has been shed on the definition strategy. According to Mintzberg (1985), the definition of a strategy is as follows: 'a pattern in a stream of decisions'. Emergent strategy expresses the idea that people have a broad long-term vision, and take only small steps towards it. Porter (1996) is talking about defining a 'competitive strategy'. This is still useful due to the competitive advantage companies try to achieve. Porter argues that competitive strategy is about being different. According to Porter (1996) it means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value. In an earlier attempt (1980) porter defined a strategy as "a broad formula for how a business is going to compete, what its goals should be, and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals. It is a combination of the ends (goals) for which the firm is striving and the means (policies) by which it is seeking to get there." There are many other definitions found in the literature. However, it is clear that there is no general understanding of the definition and it seems rather broad formula. It seems that to determine whether or not a company is using a social media strategy is not possible solely based on literature definitions.

Besides the lack of a common understanding among authors in literature regarding the definition of social media strategy, this is also the case among the respondents of the interviews. Therefore the author of this research came up with a list of aspects that will be evaluated to determine whether or not a company is using a strategy. These aspects are based upon: key aspects for a social media strategy according to the literature, and from new insights found in the collected data.

The author of this paper will determine whether or not the companies are using a social media strategy based on the following aspects:

- The degree of operationalization of the aspects according to the social media strategy canvas.
- The degree of operationalization of the aspects according to the social media implementation framework.
- The use of an implicit or explicit strategy.
- Whether or not social media was mindfully adopted upon implementation.
- The degree of activity alignment.
- The degree of difficulty of the strategy.
- The process of strategy establishment.

It is difficult to determine whether or not a company is using a social media strategy. However, it is possible to determine whether or not a strategy is emergent or planned based on the description of Mintzberg et al. (2003). "Emergent strategy expresses the idea that people have a broad long-term vision, and take only small steps towards it. They leave space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, and for participation."

## 3.5 Reliability and validity

It is hard for researchers to control every external influence on the conducted research. Hence, it is the task of the researcher to make sure it is performed at the best possible way, whereby all factors that can be controlled are locked in. Semi-structured interviews are well suited for this research due to the exploration of perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers. Second, the varied professional, educational and personal histories of the sample group precluded the use of standardized interview schedule (Barriball & While, 1994). According to Denzin (1989), it is important that every word has the same meaning to every respondent to prevent miscommunication that might interfere with the reliability of the interview. By not relying on a single research approach and methodology, the validity and credibility of the research findings are improved (Denzin, 1978). Therefore in this research paper the author will use triangulation to enhance the validity and credibility of the research. According to Barriball and While (1994), individual respondents and the circumstances surrounding each research project have an impact upon validity and reliability. Furthermore according to Gordon (1975), the researcher must be sure that any differences in answers are due to differences among the respondents rather than in the questions asked. Semi-structured interviews must ensure that the differences in the interviews are due to differences among the respondents rather than the questions asked. Chapter 1.1 in this research paper consists of a prognosis of the importance of social media regarding business purposes. Due to a lack of information regarding prognosis of social media in the literature this might be inaccurate. This might jeopardize the reliability of the forecast made in this chapter. Furthermore, a lot of US companies are researched in the literature used in this research paper regarding social media activities. However this research is about Dutch companies. This might jeopardize the validity of this research, however the author thinks due to the globalization and similarities of the business goals between Dutch companies and US companies. Although the methods are applied as mentioned above to ensure a good validity of this research, due to the difficulty of getting interviews and a bar of 4 interviews, as mentioned in chapter 3.7, this might jeopardize the validity of this research. Hereby it is important to notice that multiple interviews at the same companies were not conducted due to the lack of knowledge of other employees on in-depth social media use. A bar of 4 interviews is not optimal in terms of validity of the research paper. However, due to the time restraints in this research, it was most efficient to set a bar of 4 in-depth interviews. Due to the small sample size for the in-depth interviews and the choice of semi-structured for those interviews, the repeatability or replication of this research is not optimal. Semi-structured interviews on it's own cause different answers amongst respondents. However, broadly speaking, the outcome of the main findings of this research should be the same. A side note must be made that this cannot be guaranteed due to the small sample size of this research.

## 3.6 Assessment of data compared to literature

In this chapter the assessment of the data/literature matrix as described in chapter 4.2 will be discussed. A detailed description regarding the evaluation of the author is found in this chapter. This is important to ensure a good replication or repeatability of this research. It is importance to notice that in-depth knowledge regarding the topic is required for assessing this data/literature matrix. Table 5 is based on the evaluation of all concerned aspects by the author of this research. The aspects are reviewed in the following order: **good**, **adequate**, **inadequate**, and **poor.** First of all it is important to notice that all aspects that are evaluated have their own unique characteristics. For example, during the research it became clear it is important that the aspects of the overarching aspect 'engage' are made explicit. Therefore, the different aspects of the frameworks are differently evaluated. In addition, 'mindful adoption' is treated separately from social media implementation. This is due to a more efficient data analysis in chapter 4 and the importance of 'mindful adoption' in the social media implementation process. The overarching aspects of social media implementation are 'community building' and 'absorptive capacity'. The aspects are evaluated based on the following information:

**Overarching aspects engage**:

*Good* – All sub-aspects within the overarching aspect 'engage' are executed (one sub-aspect is allowed to deviate from the theory). In addition, the strategy or goals of the aspect 'engage' are made explicit.
*Adequate* – All sub-aspects within the overarching aspect 'engage' are executed (one sub-aspect is allowed to deviate from the theory). However, in case of an adequate evaluation the strategy or goals of the aspect 'engage' are partially made explicit, or lack a certain degree of representativeness.
*Inadequate* – All sub-aspects within the overarching aspect 'engage' are executed (one sub-aspect is allowed to deviate from the theory). However, in case of an inadequate evaluation there is a complete lack of making the strategy or goals from this aspect explicit.

Case D has thoroughly worked out all aspects of the overarching aspect 'engage'. Some goals are made explicit, but not as good as case A. Due to the thoughtful assessment of the sub-aspects by company D this has been evaluated with **good**.

**Overarching aspect enable:**

*Good* – All sub-aspects within the overarching aspect 'enable' are executed (one sub-aspect is allowed to deviate from the theory). In addition, these aspects are thoroughly thought trough.
*Poor* – More then two sub-aspects within the overarching aspect 'enable' are not executed. There is too much deviation from the theory and the process lacks thoughtfulness.

**Overarching aspect evaluate:**

In the overarching aspect 'evaluate' there are a couple of indicators for the evaluation. The main indicators are the use quantitative and qualitative metrics and the use of a social media tool. In addition, this must partly have been made explicit in order to track measurement. The degree of how explicit the aspect 'evaluate' is also determines how good this aspect is executed by the companies.

*Good* – All sub-aspects within the overarching aspect 'evaluate' are executed (one sub-aspect is allowed to deviate from the theory). In addition, the company uses a social media tool for measurement and the metrics for ROI measurement are good..
*Adequate* – One sub-aspect is missing within the overarching aspect 'evaluate', in addition there is the use of a social media tool and the ROI metrics are good. However, an adequate evaluation lacks making the goals explicit.
*Inadequate* – One sub-aspect is missing, and one sub-aspect deviates from the theory within the overarching aspect 'evaluate'. In addition, there is no tool use but the ROI metrics are good. Furthermore these goals are partially made explicit.

*Poor* – More then two sub-aspects are missing within the overarching aspect 'evaluate', there is no use of a social media tool, the metrics for ROI measurement are lacking and there is a lack of explicit goals and metrics.

**Mindful adoption**:

*Adequate –* Two sub-aspects are executed properly within the overarching aspect 'mindful adoption', in combination with a thoughtful process that determined whether or not to implemented social media.
*Inadequate* – One sub-aspect is executed properly, one sub-aspect is partially filled in and one sub-aspect is completely missing within the overarching aspect 'mindful adoption'. In addition, the thoughtfulness whether or not to implement social media is lacking.

*Poor* – More then two sub-aspects are completely lacking within the overarching aspect 'mindful adoption'. In addition the reason why the company started using social media was due to being a trend follower or another reason that severely lacks a thoughtful adoption.

**Social media implementation:**

*Good* – the overarching aspects 'community building' and 'absorptive capacity' are filled in; one sub-aspect is allowed to miss or deviate from the theory for each overarching aspect. In addition, it seems social media implementation has been thought trough well.

*Adequate* – Some sub-aspects are missing within the overarching aspects 'community building' and 'absorptive capacity', even though some aspects are filled in of both overarching aspects. In addition it seems there was a decent thoughtful process regarding social media implementation.

*Inadequate* – One of overarching aspects 'community building' or 'absorptive capacity' is completely missing. It seems that there has only been simplistic thought about social media implementation.

*Poor* – Both overarching aspects 'community building' and 'absorptive capacity' are both completely missing. In addition it might be possible that too much of the sub-aspects are missing within the overarching aspects. It seems that social media implementation is not thought trough at all.

**Activity alignment:**

*Good* – The activity alignment between social media channels and the online environment is good.

*Adequate* – There is a less thoughtful activity alignment between some social media channels and or the online environment.

*Inadequate* – There is a lacking activity alignment between social media channels and the online environment.

## 3.7 Selection of interviews

In this research the respondents of the interviews are selected base on function, experience, and degree of responsibility for social media within their company. Besides the characteristics of the interviewees, the characteristics of the concerned companies are also important. In this research paper the scope lies on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This is defined with the following thresholds: the first step to qualify as an SME is to be considered as an enterprise. According to the new definition, an enterprise is 'any entity engaged in an economic activity, irrespective of its legal form'. Whereby the activity is the determining factor, not the legal form. The thresholds for a SME are based on staff headcount, annual turnover and annual balance sheet. The headcount for a small and medium-sized enterprise most be lower then 250 employees.[3] In this research paper the scope will lie on the staff headcount of the enterprise. In addition, these SMEs are considered to be best practice cases regarding social media in a regional context. Due to the business privacy, this region is not mentioned but is found in the Netherlands and contains an area of approximately 1500 square kilometers and has approximately between 600.000 and 650.000 inhabitants. Furthermore to guarantee confidential information, the names of respondents will be replaced by their function within the company. Besides the respondents, company names will be replaced and processed into a case; the case description will give sufficient information regarding the company and the branch. This is necessary due to some businesses not agreeing with full business transparency for publication purposes. Due to the anonymity and certain business privacy, the author of this research paper hopes to get more business transparency regarding social strategies and its implementation. Examples of respondents would be: a social media marketing manager, marketing manager, a social media employee with a high degree of responsibility and decision making, and a digital or online marketing manager (whereby a company yields social media under digital and online marketing). Another thing to take into consideration is the risk of the level of knowledge in interviews; previous research indicated that sometimes the level of knowledge is so low it has no use for the research regarding frameworks and strategies. Therefore a careful selection of companies and interviewees must be made. The social media activity of the potential company will be investigated to find out if the knowledge is expected. The main indicator will be social media activity and signs of being a best practice company regarding social media. If there is almost no activity on social media, this company will not be a good candidate for this empirical research study. The interview framework as used in this research paper can be found in Appendix III. The research papers of Culnan et al. (2010), Effing and Spil (2016), and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) were leading in the formulation of the interview questions. The author of this paper has translated the interview framework, but due the difference in language this research paper will use the English version to give full transparency of the questions asked and original language of this research paper. The bar for the amount of semi-structured interviews in this empirical research will be set to four.

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# 4.    Results

This chapter will show both within-case and cross-case analyses. Each of the four cases has been summarized into a narrative story, which includes a case description, analysis and conclusion. This case will provide all information collected from the interviews regarding social media strategy use. Beside this the cross-case analysis reveals a comparison between the literature regarding the social media strategy canvas, social implementation and the collected data. The case analysis and cross-case analysis will give an insight on if and how a SME establishes a strategy. Furthermore it will shine a light on what the "strategy" consists of, how they monitor social media, social media tool use, and if the social media strategy is emergent or planned. These results are then used to answer the research questions of this research paper. As anonymity has been promised to the companies, the cases will mask information regarding the respondent and the company. All cases that are handled are defined as SMEs in the Netherlands based on headcount and definition. Furthermore it has been made sure the interviewee has enough influence regarding social media decision-making. Another thing made sure was the interviewee had at least over a year of social media marketing experience. Furthermore, the companies can be considered best practice in terms of social media marketing in their branch on a regional level.

## 4.1 Within-case analysis

In this chapter the collected data will be processed into a case. The case will consist of a case description, a case analysis and a case conclusion. In total four cases will be treated.

### 4.1.1 Case A

| Overview case A | |
|---|---|
| Company size | <250 |
| Product | Garden furniture |
| Social media goal | Branding, interaction |
| Social media platforms | Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter |
| Strategy | Yes |
| Strategy from framework/literature | No |
| Use of social media tools | Yes, OBI4WAN |
| Measuring ROI | Yes - ROPO effect |

**Case description**

Company A is active in the retail branch. In particular they sell all kinds of garden furniture. This can vary from dining sets to lounge sets to garden umbrellas. Besides this they also sell accessories like cushions and trays. The company is the market leader in this specific market and has a big e-commerce environment. The reason for the company to start with social media was common sense and to anticipate on the shift in the lifecycle regarding usage of social media by age. The youngsters/teens are innovators and early adopters. The company knew that there would be a shift during the years, and that their target audience would follow within a few years. Due to the fact they started Facebook beforehand they made sure that by the time their target audience was active on social media they could immediately find the company. The company gives a high priority towards their social media, and they not see it as a 'side thing'. Company A has a full marketing team dedicated to social media. The marketer said the following thing: "It is important to have synergy between the different channels, and that you really need a plan to achieve this. Channel synergy will provide the most powerful effect. This means that if we send out an E-mail, we make sure that the same content also come forward in our Facebook/Instagram posts".

The online marketing manager defines a strategy as follows: "before making a strategy of any kind, it is important that you have clear goals of what you want. These days we see a lot of businesses just start with something without a goal. For example, a lot of companies have built an app without a clear goal. They just want an app because that is something they believe they should have. In my opinion this is a waste of money. Regarding the social strategy, this is exactly the same thing. We have set clear goals, branding and revenue. Then we build a strategy that fits these goals and most importantly helps us to achieve these goals". The company has made an explicit strategy, but this strategy is not based on models or frameworks as found in the literature. The company has based their strategy on the AIDA model and on the Google model (see, do, think, care). In terms of importance regarding all marketing activities, the employee would estimate social media to 20% of all marketing activities and budget. "The most important factor for a social media strategy is people. Facebook is beginning with automatic optimization for their advertisements, which means that in a few months/years every business has an optimization of 100%. The input from our own employees for creative content, response time on messages is going to make a difference. It is important that those people who are going to make a difference are known with the strategy and goals

regarding social media" according to the marketer. Furthermore the marketer says that you need to show the right content to the right people. The company works together with a marketing bureau, which advises them regarding strategies and advertisements within for example Facebook.

The company uses Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter. The first three are the most important channels for their business. The company started using Facebook as a "side thing", besides sales. A social media activity calendar is made for most important months, namely from March till September. They make special giveaways during holidays like eastern. The company uses a tool named OBI4wan to monitor social media. In terms of ROI the direct conversion is measured with the use Google Analytics. In addition they use something that they call the ROPO effect to measure the indirect revenues. In terms of emergent activities, the employees of the marketing department have space to create and implement their own creative ideas. These ideas must aligned with the goal they have set for social media and needs approval of the online marketing manager. The marketer says: "strategy optimization is an ongoing process, and can always be improved". The marketing department follows upcoming social media changes very closely and adjusts their strategy towards it. They check the latest innovation, updates, and new platforms. This information comes from different sources, such as their marketing agency, marketing facts, Frankwatching or just from hear-and say. This information is discussed in a weekly marketing meeting. The complete strategy the company wanted to implement is now in full effect.

**Case Analysis:**

| Facebook of Case A as of 28 juni 2018 | |
| --- | --- |
| Facebook likes | 39.965 |
| Facebook followers | 39.146 |
| Facebook rating review | 4,7 based on 188 reviews |
| Photos placed | 897 |
| Videos placed | N/A |

| Instagram of Case A as of 28 juni 2018 | |
| --- | --- |
| Followers | 1240 |
| Posts | 478 |

| Social media strategy evaluation case A | |
| --- | --- |
| Social media strategy canvas | Yes |
| Social media implementation | Partly |
| Mindful adoption | Partly |
| Activity alignment | Yes |
| Strategy establishment | thoughtful |
| Implicit/explicit strategy | Explicit |
| **Social media strategy** | **Yes** |

First of all it is interesting to see whether or not the company mindfully adopted social media. Although the company has really thought things true whether or not to implement social media, this cannot completely be considered mindful adoption. There were lacking aspects when social media was first implemented such as risk management issues, including security and privacy issues, two metrics to measure added value, (qualitative and quantitative). In addition social media was prepared based on a prediction, rather then knowledge. Therefore, mindful adoption was not completed, although it is adequate. The company currently gives social media a high priority. This is shown with a full marketing team dedicated to social media. The company attaches a lot of value on channel synergy based on activity alignment. For example: when the company sends out an e-mail with inspiration, they make sure the same content also comes forward in their Facebook and Instagram posts. There is a good activity alignment between social media channels. The company did not recognize any of the frameworks or models as suggested by the literature. Therefore, it is interesting to see the company unconsciously fulfilled activity alignment according to the literature. The marketing department made their organizational goals for social media explicit. In addition, other factors are made explicit too. The social media strategy is made explicit to achieve these goals. The strategy is not too comprehensive, and yet complete. Furthermore the respondent adds that the right message for the right target audience is crucial for an efficient social media operationalization. Twitter is used as a monitoring 'tool'. Monitoring happens per platform, whereby the company uses OBI4Wan to monitor these different channels. The company's activity calendar is mainly important in the months from March till September due to their seasonal products. The interviewee mainly talks about special giveaways during important days to buy garden furniture from the start of the mentioned season.

The strategy of company A is based on information found on Google regarding efficient social media use, marketing models such as the AIDA model and the Google model, and channel synergy creation. The establishment of their strategy was very thoughtful and consists of a lot of marketing information. If we refute the collected data with the social media strategy canvas the company unconsciously met up with every aspect. The aspect 'resources' is operationalized. However, a side note must be made: due to business privacy they did not want to enclose the financial funds determined for it. The company operationalized the tree overarching aspects engage, enable and evaluate properly. Whereas there is almost a completely filled in social media strategy canvas, the company seems to not fully meet up with the social implementation requirements. Missing aspects of the requirements of social media implementation are: be sensitive to the normal and policies of any public platform you use, address risk management issues, share knowledge across the firm, new development for message processing, and be unprofessional from time to time in posts. This implies that the main missing overarching aspect was mindful adoption. In addition, there seems to be a small lack of aspects within the overarching aspect absorptive capacity.

Both direct and indirect ROI is measured. Indirect ROI is measured based on the ROPO effect. The ROPO effect measures the offline revenue derived from online activities. This is an interesting method for indirect ROI, this method is not mentioned in the literature and could be interesting to investigate further. Google Analytics is used to measure direct revenue from social media. In the eyes of the social media manager the social media strategy is optimized and fully implemented. The social media manager does not see the point in working out a too comprehensive strategy and then only implementing a part of it. According to the interviewee they really made an explicit strategy thought it through carefully. "You do not become market leader by just doing something randomly without any cohesion between the different departments and channels". The respondent states that the optimization of the strategy never stops, which implies it always has to be innovated. Other interesting insights from this case are that the employee said that 'people' will make a difference in future social media marketing due to automatic optimization of social media advertisements by Facebook. In addition, it is interesting to see that the company has a complete and dedicated. Furthermore in the eyes of the online marketing manager the social media strategy is optimized and fully implemented. Besides this the company works together with a marketing bureau, which advises them regarding strategies and advertisements within for example Facebook.

**Case conclusion**

In the case of Company A it is noticeable that they have really thought everything through. Activity alignment, channel synergy, strategy formulation, strategy realization and social media implementation all looks well defined. Mindful adoption was partially executed when first implementing social media. It was a thoughtful decision to actually start with social media, however some aspects such as risk management issues, and ROI measurement were lacking to completely fulfill mindful adoption from the start. The strategy is made explicit, contains organizational goals, and is achievable. In addition the establishment of the social media strategy was thoughtful and is not too easily formulated. The marketing department has thought about how to reach their target audience, monitoring, future channels based on the lifecycle of usage, and ROI measurement. The social media manager thinks the 'people' will become the most important factor for an efficient social media operationalization. This aspect seems to deviate from the literature, but is aligned with that there is no common understanding of what aspects are important.

The respondent said that the optimization of their social media strategy is an ongoing process. This is an interesting factor that might be considered for the size of a social media strategy. If a social media strategy needs to be innovated continuously, it might be interesting to only stick to compact, explicit, yet complete social media strategy. If we refute this data with the social media strategy canvas every aspect is operationalized. In conclusion: they have the three overarching aspects engage, enable and evaluate operationalized. Whereas there is almost a completely operationalized social media strategy, the company seems to not fully meet up with the social implementation requirements. In this case, the company only sticks to the 'easy' and 'obvious' factors social media implementation. This might indicate that these aspects might be operationalized based on common sense. Missing aspects regarding social media implementation are: don't mention the company in every conversation, be sensitive to the normal and policies of any public platform you use, address risk management issues, share knowledge across the firm, new development for message processing, and be unprofessional from time to time in posts. This implies that the main missing overarching aspect was mindful adoption. In addition, there seems to be a small lack of aspects within the overarching aspect absorptive capacity. Based on the aspects as described above to determine whether or not a company uses a social media strategy, it became clear that company A uses a social media strategy. In addition, there seems to be an adequate social media implementation according to the comparison with the literature.

**4.1.2. Case B**

**Case description**

| Overview case B | |
| --- | --- |
| Company size | <250 |
| Product | Professional Football Club |
| Social media goal | Inform and increase database |
| Social media platforms | Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter |
| Strategy | Yes |
| Strategy from framework/literature | No |
| Use of social media tools | No |
| Measuring ROI | Yes - Conversion only |

Company B is a professional football club based in the Netherlands. The company has business-to-consumer activities as well as business-to-business activities. They sell game tickets, merchandise, an event location, and have sponsorship contracts. The reason for the company to start with social media was being a trend follower. The company saw a good opportunity to reach out to their target audience. Social media fulfills an informing and promotional role. Social media is considered to be the biggest media channel within the business. The social media said "our organizational goals with social media are: inform, to improve database and reach and enrich data profiles (although this is harder to realize since of the new AVG), and community building. On the other side we use social media to sell game tickets, merchandise, and events". At the company social media has the most specific approach of all media channels. The marketer defines a social media strategy as follows: "the strategy is made on the organizational goals you have set yourself that you want to accomplish by means of social media". The company asked how the supporters wanted to be approached through social media. Based on this input the company formulated their 'strategy' that consists of 10 points. In addition the company established their strategy based on target audience analysis, by looking at best practice examples regarding social media, and by looking at current trends. This information was processed into a 'strategy' of 10 explicit points. These ten points can be found in the data analysis of this case. However, this only happens in the online environment. The company started using social media due to it being a trend follower. The marketer has no knowledge of social media frameworks or models from the literature.

In the opinion of the social media marketer of the company, you have to formulate everything around the target audience. "You have to think from the eyes of your target audience. If you post something that will not be received on a good way by the target audience, then it has no meaning what you are doing". Content has to fit your target audience. A marketing bureau sometimes gives advise on how to set up advertisements, and how to optimize certain channels. First the marketer said Facebook is used to reach out to the target audience on a fun way. Afterwards the marketer said Facebook is used for news, important facts, and promotional activities through advertisements. Instagram is purely used for community building, like generation and branding. LinkedIn is used for promotions and has an informing role regarding B2B. In terms of monitoring the marketer says they do target audience analyses. Who do you research with what posts and what posts do best. Based on this information the company builds new content for social media posts. Furthermore they do not follow an activity calendar regarding social media due it being difficult to have in their branch. "If we won a game you will we are active a lot, but if you lose you we will be less active on social. However we try stick to a schedule for events, like an open day. This is where we can use a schedule and post in advance". The company handles a maximum of two posts per day. In the eyes of the social media marketer content that gives business transparency is the most successful.

The social media marketer measures ROI in terms of conversion, but uses no other metrics besides CPC, CTR and CPL for social media. The most important key factor for the operationalization of social media according to the respondent is business transparency. In addition the marketer says that every they do regarding social media is based on the core values of the company. "Until a year ago, everything we did on social media happened without a strategy or any form of guideline. This ended up in a bad algorithm for Facebook. Half a year ago we made the ten points as described earlier and we saw a significant change in the algorithm from bad to good". In the eyes of the social media marketer the target audience analyses can be improved. "There are some older people working in communication or that are partly responsible for social media. In my honest opinion these people do not always notice what a certain post does towards a certain target audience. Therefore, we have to closely monitor what is working for each target audience". They check the latest updates, innovations, and new platforms by watching trends. "We are a trend follower, so we are watching the environment". Furthermore they collect information from hear and say and reading some blogs from time to time. In terms of operationalization of the strategy, the social media marketer says 90% of all things that happen on social media are aligned with the ten points as described earlier. The other 10%, which deviates from those ten points, is due to requirements with sponsorship contracts made earlier that year, whereby the company has to meet the contractual requirements of those sponsorships in terms of certain posts. Most of the social media activities happen emergent, but are aligned with the ten points as described before.

**Case analysis**

| Facebook of Case B as of 28 juni 2018 | |
| --- | --- |
| Facebook likes | 190.319 |
| Facebook followers | 181.375 |
| Facebook rating review | 4,0 based on 3500 reviews |
| Photos placed | 919 |
| Videos place | N/A |

| Instagram of Case B as of 28 juni 2018 | |
| --- | --- |
| Followers | 38.300 |
| Posts | 2756 |

| Social media strategy evaluation case B | |
| --- | --- |
| Social media strategy canvas | Partly (inadequate) |
| Social media implementation | No |
| Mindful adoption | No |
| Activity alignment | Partly |
| Strategy establishment | Simplistic |
| Implicit/explicit strategy | Explicit (10 simple points) |
| **Social media strategy** | **No** |

The 'strategy' of the social media department of case B.
The ten points as described by the social media marketer

**Key words;** Original, 'Feel Good', Overcast
**Tone of voice;** Interactive, Approachable, Campaigning.
**Target audience;** Young and Old.

- Make sure the post has an original angle of incidence.
- The text should be as short as possible. Use emoji's. Maximum of two sentences text.
- Start with a call for essence/ action!
- Search for interaction with followers, for example through polls.
- Limit the sharing of posts or target very specifically. Good content is made by ourselves.
- Upload video's, when possible do not embedd.
- Fanstore and Ticket sale content is done through advertisement.
- Facebook 'commercial' only by content.
- Use Instagram stories and Snapchat to bring commercial content.
- Make sure you thought well what the goal is of the post and if Facebook is the right channel for this goal.

First of all it is interesting to see whether or not the company mindfully adopted social media. The company is a trend follower, and it saw a good opportunity to have a good platform to reach out to their target audience. There was no thoughtful implementation and there was also no strategy. This indicates there was no mindful adoption when first implemented social media. Interesting to see is that the company sees social media as their biggest media channel, although their strategy, operationalization, monitoring and ROI measurement does not support this idea. The organizational goals with social media seem to be pretty clear in terms of informing, database enrichment, community building, reach and product conversion. However these goals have not been made explicit. When we look at the 'strategy' of the company there are no organizational goals. In addition, there are no measurement options described.

The company asked how the supporters wanted to be approached through social media. Based on this input the company formulated their 'strategy' that consists of 10 points. In addition the company established their strategy based on target audience analysis, by looking at best practice examples regarding social media, and by looking at current trends. This information was processed into a 'strategy' of 10 explicit points. This process of strategy establishment seems to be simple and not very thoughtful. It looks like the process of establishment of the strategy to quickly and easily done. The strategy is made explicit, however this 'strategy' seem to severely lack the aspects of a social media strategy as described in chapter 3.4.

According to the social media marketer the most important key factor for social media is that you have to think through the eyes of your target audience. "The content has to fit the target audience". Based on the information collected from interview the company uses different platforms that all serve different purposes without a clear line of activity alignment. There seems to be little activity alignment. However, everything they do on social media is aligned with the core values of the company. Solely alignment in terms of core values towards content does not activate complete activity alignment between channels.

A noticeable thing is that there is almost no monitoring. This seems substandard for a company with 190.000 likes, and claims social media is their biggest media channel. This seems to be very contradictory. The activity calendar of the company is an interesting case to review. This is due to the fact they are very influenced by for example winnings of the football team, or by a player transfer. In this case, it might be a good idea not to strive for a certain activity calendar. However, the company does plan in advance for things like an open day. Therefore, it seems there are enough other activities that can be planned. Instead of a specific calendar the companies handle a maximum of two posts per day. The company does not use tools for social media, even though the social media marketer would wish to use it. Due to cost reductions this year they are not allowed to spend money on this. The monitoring is done by everything the platform itself has to offer and trough target audience analyses. In terms of ROI measurement, it seems to lack. The company is basing ROI measurement solely on conversion that consists of CPC and CPL. If we refute the collected data with the research tools (social media strategy canvas and social media implementation), this 'strategy' does only meet up partly with the overarching aspect engage according to the social media strategy canvas. However, the organizational goals are not made explicit. The organizational goals are 'in the mind' and cannot be measured. If refute the collected data with the remaining aspects of the social media strategy canvas and social media implementation, almost every aspect seems to lack. Goals cannot be measured, enablement seems to be missing completely, and the evaluation of social media is substandard. Furthermore there seems to be a lack of channel synergy in terms of activity alignment. Instead the company of activity alignment is doing everything on social media based on the core values of the company. This seems to be a good basis, but needs more explicit operationalization. The aspects missing for an efficient social media implementation are all of the overarching aspects: 'mindful adoption', 'community building' and 'absorptive capacity'.

Furthermore it is really important to notice that from all the time the company is active on social media, they only started implementing a strategy half a year ago. Before this 'strategy' everything happened emergent and caused a bad influence on their newsfeed based on the algorithm of Facebook. Even though a ten-point strategy is now implemented, this plan operationalization is late. According to the marketer 90% of the strategy is being realized, but due to this very simplistic 'strategy' with only 10 items, this does not seem challenging. Therefore, the achievability of this strategy seems to lack representativeness. The other 10% that is not being realized is caused by sponsorships requirements. This is directly causing a lack in optimization of social media in terms of content generation towards their target audience.

**Case conclusion:**

Company B has not thought everything through in terms of strategy formulation and realization. First of all, mindful adoption was not realized. The timeframe and easy adoption indicates a severe lack of mindful adoption it is very clear the company is a trend follower and saw a good platform to communicate with their target audience without a clear strategy. There was no strategy or guideline operationalization up and until approximately the beginning of 2018. After the long period it took the company to implement a strategy or guideline, it implemented a very simplistic yet explicit strategy. This seems contradictory due to the fact the company implies social media is their biggest social media channel. The company asked how the supporters wanted to be approached through social media. Based on this input the company formulated their 'strategy' that consists of 10 points. In addition the company established their strategy based on target audience analysis, by looking at best practice examples regarding social media, and by looking at current trends. This information was processed into a 'strategy' of 10 explicit points. This process of strategy establishment seems to be simple and not very thoughtful.

The late implementation of a 'strategy' also caused to miss out on the full benefits of social media has to offer. In addition, late implementation of a strategy delayed the process of learning the tricks of the trade regarding social media. Interesting to see is that the marketer speaks of a 'strategy', but lacks the use of monitoring and is solely building on conversion in terms of ROI measurement. Furthermore, the organizational goals are not made explicit and seem to lack measurement options. This causes the lack of the possibility to keep track of the social media progress. Due to only using one metric for ROI organizational goals such as database enrichment, reach, data profiles and community building seem to be neglected in terms of measurement. If we refute the collected data with the research tools (social media strategy canvas and social media implementation), this 'strategy' does only meet up partly with the overarching aspect engage according to the social media strategy canvas. However, the organizational goals are not made explicit. The organizational goals are 'in the mind' and cannot be measured. If refute the collected data with the remaining aspects of the social media strategy canvas and social media implementation, almost every aspect seems to lack. Goals cannot be measured, enablement seems to be missing completely, and the evaluation of social media is substandard. Furthermore there seems to be a lack of channel synergy in terms of activity alignment. Instead the company of activity alignment is doing everything on social media based on the core values of the company. This seems to be a good basis, but needs more explicit operationalization. The aspects missing for an efficient social media implementation are all of the overarching aspects: mindful adoption, community building and

absorptive capacity. The 'strategy' is realized for 90%, although this does not seem challenging due to it being very simplistic. The strategy lacks representativeness. Therefore, it seems to be more of a guideline instead of a strategy. Even for a guideline it seems based solely on daily social media posts for someone who has never made a social media post. Based on the aspects as described above to determine whether or not a company uses a social media strategy, it became clear that company B does not use a complete social media strategy. In addition, there seems to almost a completely lacking social media implementation according to the comparison with the literature. The 'strategy' looks more like a simplistic guideline for the daily use of social media.

### 4.1.3. Case C

**Case description**

| Overview case C | |
| --- | --- |
| Company size | <250 |
| Product | Sustainable Energy |
| Social media goal | Communiy building, lead generation, conversion |
| Social media platforms | Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter, Youtube |
| Strategy | No |
| Strategy from framework/literature | No |
| Use of social media tools | Yes - OBI4Wan |
| Measuring ROI | Yes |

Company C is active in the sustainable energy market, and is a big player in this market. The company sells sustainable energy to both business-to-consumer as well as to the business-to-business environment. The reason the company has started with social media is due to social media offered a platform to reach out to the target audience in terms of: wide reach, specific advertising targeting options and community building. "Community building is the most important factor for us. This is due to the fact the sustainable energy market has a hard target audience to persuade. Conversion by means of new sustainable energy contracts through social media alone is very rare. Side products are the main focus for conversion rather than new energy contracts". The organizational goals for social media are community growth, community engagement, lead generation and conversion. However, these goals have not been made explicit.

The marketer defines a social media strategy as follows: "a strategy is the way you add value to your business by using social media". As for now the strategy is in the mind according to the marketer of the company. The company tries to achieve a certain amount of posts per week on a specific channel. However, there is no monitoring if this is actually being achieved. The company cannot measure organizational goals due the goals are not made explicit. One of the things they use social media for is branding, whereby they align everything they do on social media with the core values of the company. The marketer says that social media has a small role in the marketing department. Of all marketing activities and budgets 10% can be attributed to social media marketing. The marketer thinks social media can be expanded tremendously. However, in order to successfully achieve this you have to make the organizational goals explicit and measure them. To do all those things the marketer things the company should have fulltime employee who can focus on the job. Currently they do not have the resources for this. The marketer says that the most important factors for a social media strategy are as follows: "it is important to know your goals, how the measure them and how to determine ROI. In addition it is important to know how you can reach your target audience by the means of social media".

When social media was used in the beginning, the company outsourced some media posts designs to Brandfighters. This was a platform for content creation for special events like Kings day or something like eastern. All platforms used serve different purposes. The company uses OBI4Wan for social media monitoring and webcare. The social media marketer was not actively working during the time social media was implemented, although the marketer thinks due to the lack of an explicit strategy and it currently being a 'side thing', it was not implemented mindful. The marketer said that social media was implemented based on being a trend follower without clear goals or strategy. The company determines what they are going to post on social media every week. For big holidays such as Kings day, start of the summer they plan content for a whole year ahead. For all social media platforms besides twitter the company try to post 3-4 times per week. The social media marketer says they do measure ROI. They measure reach, engagement (likes, shares, reactions, followers), CTR and leads. Furthermore the marketer adds: " Through the tool OBI4Wan we can compare what offline advertisement would have cost to reach the same amount of people. This means we can compare social media reach with for example the reach of an advertisement in a newspaper and what that would cost".

Social media has always been 'part of the job'; time is always an issue at the marketing department. The company does not have a fulltime social media marketer. The social media marketer reads a lot of newsletters of various marketing blogs to

check the latest updates, innovations and new platforms regarding social media. The marketer recognizes there is not enough realized of the strategy due to the lack time and resources. Social media activities mainly come forth out of emergent activities due it being 'part of the job'. The marketer emphasizes there is a lack of an explicit strategy due to social media being a 'side thing'. The marketer states that if you want to reach certain goals the company needs a person for social media to make the organizational goals explicit, and measure these goals.

**Case analysis**

| Facebook of case C as of 28 juni 2018 | |
| --- | --- |
| Facebook likes | 6.619 |
| Facebook followers | 6.581 |
| Facebook rating review | N/A |
| Photos placed | N/A |
| Videos place | N/A |

| Instagram of case C as of 28 juni 2018 | |
| --- | --- |
| Followers | 1.021 |
| Posts | 213 |

| Social media strategy evaluation case C | |
| --- | --- |
| Social media strategy canvas | Partly (inadequate) |
| Social media implementation | No |
| Mindful adoption | No |
| Activity alignment | Partly |
| Strategy establishment | Simplistic |
| Implicit/explicit strategy | Implicit |
| **Social media strategy** | **No** |

First of all it is interesting to see whether or not the company mindfully implemented social media. The social media marketer was not actively working at the company during the time of implementation. However based on the lack of an explicit strategy, social media being 'part of job', and starting with social media due to being a trend follower, this indicates there was no mindful adoption when first implementing social media. The marketer says the company is more a trend follower. The company gives social media a small role, approximately 10% of the total marketing activities and budget. This is mainly due having a hard target audience to persuade with social media. The company does not have an explicit strategy and the marketer says it is mainly implicit, being 'in the mind' of the marketer. The process of strategy development seems contradictory; the marketer has an implicit strategy 'in the mind'. However, some parts are worked out pretty well. The strategy is based on others (being a trend follower), and core value alignment with content. The total establishment process of their strategy seems to be easy and quickly formulated.

All of the different social media platforms used serve completely different purposes. In addition, there does not seem to be activity alignment between channels. However, the company aligns everything they do with the core values of the company. Therefore, content alignment is only partially implemented. The goals mentioned by the social media marketer seem pretty thoughtful. However, these organizational goals are not made explicit. The lack of explicit organizational goals causes that the company cannot measure and evaluate the added value of social media. Interesting to see is even though the company lacks an explicit strategy, social media monitoring and ROI are set up pretty efficiently. The social manager says that the most important factors for a social media strategy are: know your goals, how to measure them and how to determine ROI. The ROI is measured with both qualitative and quantitative metrics. The metrics used are: reach, engagement (likes, shares, reactions, followers), CTR and CPL. The metrics used seem good, but due to the lack of explicit goals it seems rather inefficient. In this case the lack time and human resources seem to negatively influence the efficiency of the social media use for business purposes. The knowledge about how to efficiently implement and create a social media strategy seems to be up to date. The company monitors social media through the use of OBI4Wan. The use of OBI4Wan is also used for web care. The activity calendar seems to be determined per week based on what kind of information is going to be shared rather then the frequency of social media posts. However, the company is trying to post 3-4 times per week.

If we refute the collected data with the social media strategy canvas the company almost completely lacks execution of all aspects. The aspect 'engage' is worked out, although this is 'in the mind' and not made explicit. The marketer did not make the organizational goals explicit. The company has give a thought about the enablement of social media according to the social media strategy canvas, but this is not realized. Furthermore it is interesting and noticeable to see that although these overarching aspects are lacking, it seems to have a pretty efficient evaluate aspect in terms of how to measure ROI and how to use different metrics. The metrics used are: reach, engagement (likes, shares, reactions, followers), CTR and CPL. The metrics used seem good, but due to the lack of explicit goals it seems rather inefficient. In addition the company does monitor social media with the tool OBI4Wan. The company frequently checks what people say about the company with the tool OBI4Wan. Therefore, the listening to the customer part of the social media strategy is filled in pretty well. Although the social media strategy canvas seems to be worked out in the 'mind' pretty well, it lacks the explicit version of it to make it measureable. In addition to making it measureable, the company can also keep track of the progress when adding explicit organizational goals and a explicit strategy. However, whereas some of these aspects are unconsciously filled this does not seem to be the case for social media implementation. The three important overarching mindful adoption, community building and absorptive capacity are all missing for the most parts. The sub aspect 'design qualitative and quantitative metrics' is implemented.

Important to notice is that it seems in all this time, social media is seen as a 'side thing'. This can, according to the literature, also result in some negative branding. It seems that in all the time of social media, it is not operationalized 100% while the basis regarding strategy is very promising. The marketer is aware that social media can be improved, but due to the lack of time and human resources this is currently not possible.

**Case conclusion**

Company C has a very promising basis for an efficient social media strategy. However, due to the fact organizational goals and a strategy are not made explicit the company cannot measure the progress made with social media. Due to being a trend follower, and too little evaluation whether or not social media should be implemented, mindful adoption was not realized when first implementing social media. Due to the lack of human resources, time becomes an issue for the current social media marketer. This directly causes a lack in explicit organizational goals with social media strategy. The process of strategy development seems contradictory; the marketer has an implicit strategy 'in the mind'. However, some parts are worked out pretty well. The strategy is based on others (being a trend follower), and core value alignment with content. The total establishment process of their strategy seems to be easy and quickly formulated. In addition there seem to be a poor activity alignment between channels besides the core value alignment with content.

If we refute the data with the literature, it seems that the marketer thought the 'engage', however the marketer did not make this explicit. The aspect 'engage' seems to be lacking. Surprisingly the aspect 'evaluation' is pretty efficient in terms of the metrics being measured. The metrics are both quantitative and qualitative. This is also the only sub aspect from social media implementation that is executed at the company. In addition, the organizational goals are not made explicit so the metrics used seem to be inefficient. The overarching community building and absorptive capacity seem to be completely lacking. Mindful adoption (besides quantitative and qualitative metrics) seems to be lacking as well.

Based on the aspects as described above to determine whether or not a company uses a social media strategy, it became clear that company C does not use a complete social media strategy. In addition, there seems to almost a completely lacking social media implementation according to the comparison with the literature. The strategy is too implicit. The marketer seems to know what needs to be improved, but due to the lack of human resources and time this is currently not possible. The marketer does not want to inefficiently work out a strategy.

### 4.1.4. Case D

| Overview case D | |
|---|---|
| Company size | <250 |
| Product | Employment agency |
| Social media goal | Conversion, branding |
| Social media platforms | Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn |
| Strategy | Yes |
| Strategy from framework/literature | No |
| Use of social media tools | No |
| Measuring ROI | Yes |

**Case description**

Company D is active in the employment agency branch and is one of the biggest players in the Dutch market. The company started using social media to bind their target audience to them. Social media plays a big role in terms of all marketing activities at the firm. "We have a high interaction rate with the target audience, and there are a lot of active followers on Facebook who respond to the company. The organizational goals with social media are conversion in terms of to 'pull' job candidates, and on the other side to inspire people. This can be seen as branding". In the eyes of the marketer a social media strategy is a guideline you make conform your own brand. Activities you do afterwards should be aligned with these guidelines. "We are using a social media strategy. However, this company is a company based on feeling, which is also applicable for the activities on social media". The marketer thinks this approach is fine for social media, although the marketer sees this slowly shifting towards data driven marketing. Their main inspiration for their strategy establishment comes from big companies such as Red Bull and Nike. The marketing department is watching how these companies reach out to their target audience by means of social media. After this analyses the marketing team determined what could be used in their own social media strategy. In addition they formed a strategy around the core values of the company, and used a trial and error method to optimize their social media strategy. When social media was first implemented, the content was mainly based on a feeling. However before implementing social media the company has really thought about whether or not to implement it. Before starting, the company made a plan of approach for some aspects regarding social media. However, this only consisted of a small part of total aspects that could be beneficial for the use of social media. The largest part of the social media implementation process was based on the trial and error method.

The company uses 15-20% of all marketing budget and time for social media marketing. In the opinion of the marketer, the most important key factor for a social media strategy is that social media should be aligned with the brand. Meaning that everything you do on social media is based on the core values of the company. The company specifically chose not to outsource social media. "One of the core values of this company is that we chose to pull 'creativity' in house. This means we recruited two persons who make all creative content for us. In terms of measuring, dashboards or strategy the company never outsourced anything. This is part of the general strategy; we think that our own team knows what is best in terms of marketing related decisions for this company". "Besides this, in previous marketing experience 3rd parties made a lot of mistakes. This was very time consuming, and was not worth it at the end". The company uses different kinds of social media platforms for different purposes. LinkedIn is used to recruit people. Facebook is used for entertainment, spirit, information exchange and branding. Instagram is also used for recruitment but has a different target audience. The company has different target audiences; a label for the youth and 'volume' vacancies, which is based on people who are less educated.

The marketer says that currently the company lacks social media monitoring. Currently the company is looking for different tools to use for monitoring. However, for now the company uses Facebook Analytics. The marketer aligns all content used on social media with the core values of the company. In addition, the company does not same post the same core value five times per week. The company tries to mix up the different core values as much as possible. The marketer tries to post 3 to 5 times per week on social media. Furthermore they have a monthly action, which is considered to be a very big project. The company does measure ROI but finds it very difficult in their segment. Content that is based on inspiration is hard to measure, but content based on hard conversion can be measured. The marketer says that it is very difficult in their branch due the process of employee placement. The company measure CPL (cost per lead) CPC (cost per click) and CPV (cost per view). Other metrics measured are reach, and for a big action the company tries to reach 100.000 persons. The most important factor for both social media strategy and implementation in the eyes of the marketer is to align everything you do with the core values of your brand. Currently most activities regarding social media happen emergent, but are aligned with the core values of the company and the implicit strategy. The marketer thinks making an explicit strategy can help them to achieve more business revenue from social media. Only a couple of aspects are made explicit for the social media strategy such as social media costs available (CPC/CPL) and the core values used in the content. In addition the marketer says that one of the things they notice is that for things like a big action, they see saturation in terms of efficiency and reach after a year of use. Hereby the marketer says: "one of the that might be a learning point for us, is that we continually need to innovate our strategy". The marketer stays up to date by reading a lot of blogs to stay up to date with updates, innovations and new platforms regarding social media. The marketer thinks a lot of the strategy is operationalized. As a argument she says "if you look at our company being one of the biggest players in our sector then we did something right. We created a platform that bonds us with our target audience". ROI is measured, but not enough the marketer adds to the interview.

**Case analysis**

| Facebook of case D as of 28 juni 2018 | |
|---|---|
| Facebook likes | 29.443 |
| Facebook followers | 29.057 |
| Facebook rating review | N/A |
| Photos placed | N/A |
| Videos place | N/A |

| Instagram of case D as of 28 juni 2018 | |
|---|---|
| Followers | 496 |
| Posts | 39 |

| Social media strategy evaluation case D | |
|---|---|
| Social media strategy canvas | Partly (inadequate) |
| Social media implementation | Partly |
| Mindful adoption | Partly |
| Activity alignment | Yes |
| Strategy establishment | Simplistic |
| Implicit/explicit strategy | Implicit |
| **Social media strategy** | **No** |

First of all it is interesting to see whether or not the company has mindfully adopted social media. The marketer of the company said that the company has really thought about whether or not they should implement social media when it first came to talk. However, when first implemented, it was mainly based on a feeling and happened through trial and error. If we look at the data provided by the marketer mindful adoption was partly realized. The company really thought whether or not to implement social media and determined the risks. However, starting social media based feeling, inspiration mainly coming from other companies, the trial and error method and a simplistic strategy does not meet up with the full requirements of mindful adoption. The main inspiration for their strategy establishment comes from big companies such as Red Bull and Nike. The marketing watching how these companies reach out to their target audience by means of social media. After this analyses the marketing team determined what could be used in their own social media strategy. In addition they formed a strategy around the core values of the company, and used a trial and error method to optimize their social media strategy. The establishment of the strategy seems to lack marketing information and has not been made explicit. It seems that there has not been spend enough time on the social media strategy formulation. The organizational goals and the strategy are implicit. Things as CPL (cost per lead) CPC (cost per click), and the core values of the company are made explicit.

In terms of activity alignment, there is alignment in terms of content alignment with the core values of company. Besides this due to multiple target audiences, different uses of social media platforms are inevitable. This causes a certain degree of lack regarding content alignment between channels but is inevitable. The company tries to spread different core values of the company throughout the week. There is a goal of posting approximately 3 to 5 times per week. Besides this, there is a big action every month. The goals of the frequency of the posts (3-5) are not made explicit are not being measured. Currently the company is not using any tools for social media. The marketer thinks there is too little monitoring. The company measure CPL (cost per lead) CPC (cost per click) and CPV (cost per view). Other metrics measured are reach, and for a big action the company tries to reach 100.000 persons. The company filled in the aspect 'engage' according to the social media strategy canvas, however failed in making this aspect explicit. The aspect 'engage' is not operationalized. The aspect 'evaluate' seems to be adequate in terms of ROI measurement (both qualitative and quantitative metrics used). However, due to the lack of an explicit strategy and goals these measurement options seem to be inefficient. In terms of social media implementation the overarching aspects absorptive capacity is completely lacking. In addition, mindful adoption seems to be inadequate due to the lack of risk management issues, the trial and error method, and do a lot based on feeling. In addition there seems to be a complete lack of the overarching aspect absorptive capacity. The company operationalizes the overarching aspect community building properly.

**Case conclusion**

Company D has a very promising basis to build and implement an efficient social media strategy. The main problem seems to be that an explicit strategy is missing. The organizational goals are not made explicit either. This means it is difficult for the company to check whether or not organizational goals are being achieved. The establishment of the strategy seems to lack marketing information and has not been made explicit. It seems that there has not been spend enough time on the social media strategy formulation and is too easily created. Due to being a trend follower, the trial and error method, a lot of activities that are happening from gut feeling, mindful adoption was not completely realized. However, the company did really thought about whether or not to implement social media. In terms of activity alignment, there is alignment in terms of content alignment with the core values of company. Besides this due to multiple target audiences, different uses of social media platforms are inevitable. This causes a certain degree of lack regarding content alignment between channels but is inevitable. Therefore, the activity alignment seems to be optimized in their specific case.

The company measure CPL (cost per lead) CPC (cost per click) and CPV (cost per view). Other metrics measured are reach, and for a big action the company tries to reach 100.000 persons. The company filled in the aspect 'engage' according to the social media strategy canvas, however failed in making this aspect explicit. The aspect 'engage' is not operationalized. The aspect 'evaluate' seems to be adequate in terms of ROI measurement (both qualitative and quantitative metrics used). However, due to the lack of an explicit strategy and goals these measurement options seem to be inefficient. In terms of social media implementation the overarching aspects absorptive capacity is completely lacking. In addition, mindful adoption seems to be inadequate due to the lack of risk management issues, the trial and error method, and do a lot based on feeling. In addition there seems to be a complete lack of the overarching aspect absorptive capacity. The company operationalizes the overarching aspect community building properly.

Based on the aspects as described above to determine whether or not a company uses a social media strategy, it became clear that company D does not use a complete social media strategy. The strategy seems to be too easily formulated and too many important aspects are missing. Furthermore the strategy is too implicit. However, the implicit strategy operationalizes approximately 60% based on the research tools as described before (social strategy canvas and social media implementation).

## 4.2 Cross-case analysis

In this empirical research the goal was to find out whether or not companies are using a social media strategy. In addition, this research will provide a closer look towards what a strategy is, how this strategy is operationalized and what is realized of this strategy. Therefore, this study gives insight into four cases with four regional best practice SMEs in their industry based on their social media. Furthermore it is interesting to refute success factors for both social media strategy and social media implementation provided by the data collected with the literature. In addition, it is interesting to find out why there is a gap between social media strategy formulation and social media strategy implementation. First of all it is important to see who is responsible for social media at the companies, what their age is and how many years of experience they have.

**Table 3. Information regarding the social media decision makers of the companies**

| Respondent | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Function | Online Marketing Manager | Marketer | Marketer | Operational Marketing Manager |
| Age | 25 | 24 | 25 | 28 |
| Experience * | 3 | 1,5 | 2 | 1,5 |

* Years of experience in the field of social media marketing / marketing

Table 3 shows information about respondents. Noticeable is the only function that seems to fit solely towards social media marketing is from case A. This indicates a more specific role, while other respondents fit a function that is broader then just online/social media marketing. Furthermore it seems the online marketing manager of case A has the most experience in his field. The decision maker of case D seems to have more decision-making authorities in more then one field compared to the other marketers. All marketers besides the marketer of case B have decision making authority, although the marketer of case B is partly responsible for the social media and only has to follow a couple of house rules. Interesting to see is that relatively low age of the marketers, whereby it is expected younger people are more familiar with the usage of social media and perhaps how to reach the target audience more efficiently. The marketer of case B also suggests this. However, there is no scientific prove to support this specific relation.

**Table 4. Time of strategy or guideline establishment**

| When is a strategy or guideline established | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Before social media implementation | x | | | |
| During social media implementation | | | | x |
| After social media implementation | | x | x | |

Table 4 provides information when a strategy or guideline was established for social media. It is interesting to see that only one company has made a strategy before actually implementing social media. During the initial phase of social media implementation company D has fine-tuned their strategy with the trial and error method. Company B and Company C are both way past those phases whereby it is exceptional to see company B only handled a 'ten point' strategy for social media posts half a year ago. The time of implementing a 'strategy' might be an indicator about the degree of difficulty of the social media strategy process.

**Table 5. Literature/data matrix**

| Literature/data matrix | Social media strategy canvas Effing and Spil (2016) | | | Mindful adoption Culnan et al. (2010) | Social media implementation Culnan et al. (2010), Kaplan and Haenlein | Activity alignment Kaplan and Haenlein |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Engage | Enable | Evaluate | | | |
| Case A | Good | Good | Good | Adequate | Adequate | Good |
| Case B | Adequate | Poor | Poor | Poor | Poor | Adequate |
| Case C | Inadequate | Poor | Adequate | Poor | Poor | Inadequate |
| Case D | Good | Poor | Inadequate | Inadequate | Inadequate | Good |

Table 5 provides insights regarding how models from the literature are filled in according to the data provided by the companies. This table is based on the evaluation of all concerned aspects by the author of this research. The aspects are reviewed in the following order: **good**, **adequate**, **inadequate**, and **poor**. Detailed description regarding the assessment of this literature/data matrix can be found in chapter 3.6.

Interesting to see is that most of the companies have a certain level of engagement based on the overarching aspect of the social media strategy canvas. This consists of:

- What the organizational goals are.
- What are appropriate social media channels?
- Who are in their target audience?
- What their content and activity calendar is.

This means that companies unconsciously partly or completely fill in and use the overarching concept 'engage' according to the social media strategy canvas. The overarching aspect 'engage' is unconsciously activated by establishing a strategy based on the following aspects: marketing information, competition or examples and core value alignment with content. What is seen within the four cases is that that everything is thought through of the aspect 'engage'. However there seems to be a lack of making aspect 'engage' explicit. Furthermore companies B,C and D do not implement or partly implement the overarching aspects 'enable' and 'evaluate'. The main aspects missing within the social media strategy canvas are: capacity, partners, resources, monitoring, tools and listening. Companies try to post content a certain amount per week, whereas for example company A has an explicit goal. Company D strives for a reach 100.000 with their big social media action. This seems to result in being more consistently active on social media platforms then companies B and C. It is interesting to see that both enable and evaluate aspects from all companies seems to be poor and inadequate with the exception of company A. The overarching aspects 'enable' and 'evaluate' have similarities with some of the social media implementation factors as mentioned by Culnan et al. (2010).

Social media implementation of Culnan et al. (2010) and the overarching aspects 'enable' and 'evaluate' of Effing and Spil (2016) share some of similar aspects. Both authors mention the same aspects: content, capacity, policies and monitoring. However the social media implementation framework is more activating then the social media strategy canvas of Effing and Spil (2016). It is interesting to see that the lack of the 'activating' part of the social media strategy canvas seems to be the main problem of the companies with the exception of company A. The missing aspects for social media implementation are found in the overarching aspects 'mindful adoption' and 'absorptive capacity'. Interesting to see is that company B and C seem to lack almost every aspect regarding social media implementation as suggested by Culnan et al. (2010). As mentioned in the literature study, it was expected that there was a gap between social media strategy formulation and social media implementation. Table 5 confirms this gap.

As seen in the four cases, the main issues resulting in a lacking strategy are as follows:

- The lack of an explicit social media strategy (canvas).
- Missing mindful adoption and absorptive capacity according to the social media implementation theory.
- Inefficient measurement methods due to the lack of explicit organizational goals.

The lack of making an explicit social media strategy seems to negatively influence the realization and evaluation of the strategy. Three out of four companies have a good basis for a social media strategy. However, all companies except for company A lack making most aspects that they have in their mind explicit. This also seems to cause inefficient measurement methods as seen at companies B and C. Companies B,C and D lack the ability to efficiently keep track and measure social media goals. Table 5 also gives a clear insight that companies do not efficiently implement social media according to the literature. Aspects provided by Culnan et al. (2012) for an efficient social media implementation such as addressing risk management issues seem to be neglected by most companies. According to the social media implementation framework it is also important to have quantitative as well as qualitative metrics to measure the value of social media applications. However only 50% of the companies researched implemented both qualitative and quantitative metrics. The merger of the social media strategy canvas with the implementation model can lead to an interesting and useful new canvas. This merged canvas would consist of both strategy formulation and implementation. This would result in an activating role, as well as an informing role. Companies B and C only activate a few aspects of social implementation according to Culnan et al. (2010). Table 5 also indicates that the gap as found in the literature between social media formulation and its implementation is also found in practice.

Tree out of four companies attach a lot of value to content alignment based on the core values of the company. Noticeable is that the best performing company in terms of explicit strategy use that meet up with a lot of aspects as suggested by the literature, does not share this factor. Instead of focusing on content alignment based on core values, this company strives for activity alignment for the complete e-commerce environment. However, besides the focus of activity alignment between for the complete e-commerce environment, this company also mentions content alignment with the core values of the company. It is interesting to see that all companies attach a lot of value to content alignment based on the core values of the company. However, solely content alignment based on the core values of the company does not seem to be an efficient method for the strategy formulation. The companies that have a poorly formulated strategy seem to lack the necessary marketing information.

Table 5 also shows whether a company unconsciously or consciously is using aspects of a social media strategy framework according to the literature. None of the respondents were familiar with a social media framework or model as suggested by literature. Therefore, all aspects that are partly or completely filled in by the companies are automatically unconsciously used. Noticeable but not surprising is that almost no company has fully mindfully adopted social media from the beginning. This might be due to the fact social media was a rapidly evolving trend. When the business environment saw business opportunities and the rapidly evolving trend, companies might have implemented social media too quickly and not mindful enough. However it seems that in case of new innovations or the shift towards a new platform, mindful adoption can make a big difference in terms of efficiently implementing this new innovation. It is interesting to find out almost every company implements a certain degree of the overarching aspect 'engage' according to the social media strategy canvas. This might due to fact that this aspect shares a lot of similarities with basic marketing information such as determining organizational goals and the target audience. Furthermore, it is interesting to see that there is a high degree of activity alignment between the companies. In addition, it is interesting to see that the aspects according to the social media implementation framework of Culnan et al. (2010), are less well operationalized. This seems to fit what is found in the literature regarding the gap between social media strategy formulation and its implementation. The most unconscious use of literature is seen in the factors 'engage' and activity alignment. A surprising factor for the author of this research paper is that all companies measure a certain degree of ROI. It was estimated based on the literature research that companies would severely lack on ROI, but this seems wrong. Companies have partly figured out how to measure ROI. Sometimes there seem to be a lack in the metrics used, or in making this aspect explicit. In addition, sometimes there seems to be a lack in the use of both quantitative and qualitative metrics.

**Table 6. Emergent or planned social media activities**

| Strategy | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Planned or emergent | Both | Emergent | Emergent | Emergent |
| Implicit or explicit | Explicit | Explicit * | Implicit | Explicit * |

Table 6 shows whether the strategy is planned or emergent, and if this strategy is implicit or made explicit. Whether a strategy is planned or emergent is determined based on the information of Mintzberg et al. (2003). "Emergent strategy expresses the idea that people have a broad long-term vision, and take only small steps towards it. They leave space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, and for participation". Tree out of four companies seem to completely operate an emergent strategy based on the definition of Mintzberg et al. (2003). The companies have a broad long-term vision and take small steps towards it. This is seen in small and easily formulated strategies. Company A has a more comprehensive strategy but also

leaves space to react to uncertainty, to experiment and for participation. However, a lot of aspects according to the social media strategy canvas and social media implementation framework are worked out well. Therefore, we can conclude that company A has a partially planned strategy, as well as emergent. Based on the information as provided by Mintzberg et al. (2003), as well as from evaluation of the strategies, it seems that a completely planned strategy would be very inefficient, if not impossible to achieve. A partially emergent strategy seems to be the most efficient due to the fast changing online environment. A partially emergent strategy leaves space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, and be able to respond quickly to new opportunities. Due to this, a new question arises which is as following: can it be good "not having a strategy"? This however does not seem to be efficient. Based on the information collected both in literature research as well as in practice, it seems that an explicit strategy seems to benefit the measurement of organizational goals, as well as governance and ROI measurement. Therefore, an explicit yet emergent strategy seems to be the most efficient in the social media environment.

**Table 7. Strategy realization and difficulty of strategy**

|  | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strategy realization | Full | 90% | Almost none | Full |
| Difficulty of strategy | Comprehensive | Simplistic | Easy | Easy |

An implicit strategy is a strategy that 'is in the mind' of the marketer. This strategy has not been made explicit. A strategy is evaluated as explicit when at least a couple of aspects to achieve the organizational of the company are put on paper. **\*** It is debatable whether or not the strategies of company B and D can be seen as explicit. This is due small amount of the strategy that actually has been made explicit. In addition, the difficulty of the strategies of company B and C are evaluated easy based on the number of aspects created to achieve their organizational goals.

**Establishment of strategy**

It seems the companies have different ways of how they establish their strategy. Among the four case studies the following aspects are used in terms of strategy establishment:

**Company A:** Information found on Google, marketing models (AIDA model, Google model) activity alignment in terms of channel synergy
**Company B:** Best practice examples, customer input, content alignment based on core values
**Company C:** Trial and Error, best practice examples (Red bull, Nike), content alignment based on core values
**Company D:** Best practice examples, content alignment based on core values

The establishment of a social media strategy seems to be fairly poor and easily formulated by companies B, C and D. These companies attach a lot of value to content alignment based on the core values of the company. Noticeable is that the best performing company A in terms of explicit strategy use that meet up with a lot of aspects as suggested by the literature, does not share the importance of this factor. Instead of focusing on content alignment based on core values, this company strives for activity alignment for the complete e-commerce environment. However, besides the focus of activity alignment between for the complete e-commerce environment, this company also mentions content alignment with the core values of the company. It is interesting to see that all companies attach a lot of value to content alignment based on the core values of the company. However, solely content alignment based on the core values of the company does not seem to be an efficient method for the strategy formulation. The companies that have a poorly formulated strategy seem to lack the necessary marketing information.

**Table 8. Strategy use based on evaluation**

| Use of social media strategy | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | x |  |  |  |
| No |  | x | x | x |

**Table 9. Evaluated choice of denominaton**

| Evaluated choice of denomination | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit social media strategy | x |  |  |  |
| Implicit social media strategy |  |  | x | x |
| Implicit social media plan |  | x |  |  |

There is no general understanding of the definition social media strategy among the respondents. Besides the lack of a common understanding among the respondents, this is also the case among authors in the literature. Therefore the author of this research came up with a list of aspects that will be evaluated to determine whether or not a company is using a strategy. These aspects are based upon: key aspects for a social media strategy according to the literature, and from new insights found in the collected data.

The author of this paper will determine whether or not the companies are using a social media strategy based on the following aspects:

- The degree of operationalization of the aspects according to the social media strategy canvas.
- The degree of operationalization of the aspects according to the social media implementation framework.
- The use of an implicit or explicit strategy.
- Whether or not social media was mindfully adopted upon implementation.
- The degree of activity alignment.
- The degree of difficulty of the strategy.
- The process of strategy establishment.

Comparison of the collected data with the aspects as described above will determine whether or not a company is using a social media strategy. First of all it is important to mention that all marketers think they use a social media strategy. However, evaluation based on the aspects as described above, it seems only one company A uses a social media strategy. Noticeable to see is that the marketers of companies B and D tell that their 'strategies' are almost completely operationalized. However these strategies seem to lack repetitiveness due to the simplicity of the strategy. When a strategy basically only consists of content alignment with core values of the company, this is easy achievable. This results in an operationalization of 100%. However, due to companies want to achieve full benefits of social media for business purposes, this indicates a certain amount of missing aspects for a complete and efficient social media strategy. The author of this research defined the 'social media plans' of companies B, C and D in table 9.

The best scoring companies A and D regarding strategy formulation and implementation both mention that social media strategy optimization is an ongoing process. This indicates that a social media strategy needs to leave space for optimization. In other words, it has no use for a social media strategy to be too comprehensive and detailed. This seems to be aligned with the theory of Mintzberg et al. (2003). A good basis for an efficient social media strategy seems to be an explicit version of the social media strategy canvas. In addition a good basis for social media implementation is an operationalized social media implementation framework as suggested by Culnan et al. (2010). The combination of both frameworks can serve as an interesting canvas to ensure both strategy and implementation. An explicit social media strategy implementation canvas might be very beneficial for companies to ensure efficient social media use for business purposes.

**Conclusion**

First of all it is noticeable that all companies think they use a social media strategy. However, based on the evaluation of the aspects as described in chapter 3.4 this does not appear to be the case. After thorough evaluation by the author of this research paper based on described aspects to determine social media strategy use, it became clear that tree out of four companies research do not implement a social media strategy. In addition, based on the definition of emergent strategies as described by Mintzberg et al. (2003) we can conclude that tree out of four companies have an emergent 'strategy'. In addition the remaining 25% companies uses a combination of both a planned and emergent strategy. One company has a complete implicit strategy, while tree out of four companies say to have an explicit strategy. However, after evaluation of the author of this research paper it seems that out of the tree companies having an explicit strategy, two companies have a strategy that only consists of a couple of points. Therefore, it is debatable whether or not these 'points' can be assigned to having an explicit strategy. Three companies lack explicit organizational goals for social media. Based on literature research as well as data collected from the interviews it became clear a partially emergent strategy is most efficient. A partially emergent strategy seems to be the most efficient due to the fast changing online environment. An emergent strategy leaves space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, and be able to respond quickly to new opportunities.

Another goal of this research paper was to find out whether or not companies used social media frameworks as suggested by the literature. The only aspect of a social media framework that is completely filled in by the companies is the aspect 'engage' of the social media strategy canvas. However, tree out of four companies failed to make this aspect explicit. For example, these companies failed to make their organizational goals for social media explicit. Tree out of four companies do not, or partially meet up with requirements for a social media strategy based on the aspects 'enable' and 'evaluate'. The main factors missing for completion of the overarching 'enable' and 'evaluate' aspects are: capacity, partners, resources, monitoring, tools and listening. When we refute the collected data with social media implementation factors according to the literature based on the framework of Culnan et al. (2010), two out of four companies almost completely lack implementation of all aspects. One company implemented social media adequate according to the framework of Culnan et al. (2010), and one company has an inadequate social media implementation. The assessed aspects are: 'mindful adoption', 'community building' and 'absorptive capacity'. The establishment of a social media strategy seems to be fairly poor and easily formulated by 75% of the companies. Tree out of four companies attach a lot of value to content alignment based on the core values of the company.

# 5. Conclusion

In this empirical research the goal was to find out whether or not companies are using a social media strategy. In addition, this research will provide a closer look towards what a strategy is, how this strategy is operationalized and what is realized of this strategy. Therefore, this study gives insight into four cases with four regional best practice SMEs in their industry that are active on social media. Through a literature review and semi structured interviews data was collected and analyzed through cross-case analysis.

The literature research shows that there is a gap between social media strategy formulation and social media implementation. Furthermore there seems to be a lack in the literature on how social media is implemented by SMEs. During the explorative phase it became clear that there is no common understanding in literature regarding the definition of a social media strategy. The data collected from the interviews show a lack of common understanding of the definition social media strategy among the respondents. All companies think they use a social media strategy. However, based on the evaluation of the aspects as described in chapter 3.4 this does not appear to be the case. After thorough evaluation by the author of this research paper based on described aspects to determine social media strategy use, it became clear that tree out of four companies research do not implement a social media strategy. In addition, based on the definition of emergent strategies, we can conclude that tree out of four companies have an emergent 'strategy'. In addition the remaining 25% companies uses a combination of both a planned and emergent strategy. Based on the information as provided in the literature research, as well as from evaluation of the strategies, it seems that a completely planned strategy would be very inefficient, if not impossible to achieve. A partially emergent strategy seems to be the most efficient due to the fast changing online environment. A partially emergent strategy leaves space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, and be able to respond quickly to new opportunities. Due to this, a new question arises which is as following: can it be good "not having a strategy"? This however does not seem to be efficient. Based on the information collected both in literature research as well as in practice, it seems that an explicit strategy seems to benefit the measurement of organizational goals, as well as governance and ROI measurement. Therefore, an **explicit** yet **emergent strategy** seems to be the most efficient in the social media environment.

Due to the lack of a common understanding of the definition social media strategy in literature and among the respondents, it was useful to evaluate whether the social media strategy was implicit or explicit. One company has a complete implicit strategy, while tree out of four companies say to have an explicit strategy. However, after evaluation of the author of this research paper it seems that out of the tree companies having an explicit strategy, two companies have a strategy that only consists of a couple of points. Therefore, it is debatable whether or not these 'points' can be assigned to having an explicit strategy. A disappointing conspicuousness is that tree out of four companies lack explicit organizational goals for social media. It became clear that due to the lack of an explicit strategy measurement options of organizational goals are inefficient amongst the researched companies. In addition an explicit strategy seems to be favorable for governance and ROI. Therefore we can conclude there is a need for a more explicit social media strategy amongst the researched companies.

None of the respondents were familiar with a social media framework or model as suggested by literature. A goal of this research was to find out whether or not companies used social media frameworks as suggested by the literature. The only aspect of a social media framework that is completely filled in by the companies is the aspect 'engage' of the social media strategy canvas. However, tree out of four companies failed to make this aspect explicit. For example, these companies failed to make their organizational goals for social media explicit. Tree out of four companies do not, or partially meet up with requirements for a social media strategy based on the aspects 'enable' and 'evaluate'. The main factors missing for completion of the overarching 'enable' and 'evaluate' aspects are: capacity, partners, resources, monitoring, tools and listening. Interesting to see that all companies have a certain degree of ROI measurement. Before conducting the semi-structured interviews the author made a prediction that companies would lack any form of ROI measurement. When we refute the collected data with social media implementation factors according to the literature two out of four companies almost completely lack all social media implementation aspects. One company implemented social media adequate according to the framework that is used as a research tool for social media implementation in this research, one company has an inadequate social media implementation, and two companies have a poor social media implementation.

The literature research shows a gap between social media formulation and social media implementation. According to the literature it seems social media implementation is more activating, whereas the social media strategy canvas seems to be more thoughtful and questioning based. The data collected from the interviews supports this gap as found in the literature. The succession of a social media strategy in terms of implementation seems to be lacking amongst the companies. Therefore there is a need of a more explicit strategy that is executed and measured, as well as a more efficient implementation of social media (strategies). It seems that unconsciously companies execute several aspects of a social media strategy, however on the implementation side this seems to be lacking. In addition, when we refute the collected data with social media implementation factors according to the literature, two out of four companies almost completely lack all social media implementation aspects. One company implemented social media adequate, and one company has an inadequate social media implementation. Therefore, besides strategy formulation there needs to be more attention for the implementation aspect of social media strategies. This supports the gap found in the literature between strategy formulation and social media implementation.

As mentioned above, social media implementation is lacking amongst the companies. The most lacking overarching aspects are 'mindful adoption' and 'absorptive capacity'. Interesting to see is that companies seem to almost completely lack addressing risk management issues for mindful adoption decisions. Furthermore, it seems that companies in general did not 'mindfully adopted' social media. Most companies just started with social media without assessing risks and without a plan. Mindful adoption can play an important role for future implementation of new platforms. In addition, 50% of the companies seem to lack the creation of both quantitative and qualitative metrics for measuring the value of social media applications. Aspects of 'community building' seems to be executed by the companies based on common knowledge or common sense. It seems that in the overarching aspect absorptive capacity a lot of progress can be booked in assigning responsibility. It seems that companies are in need of a more efficient social media implementation. These aspects 'mindful adoption', 'community building' and 'absorptive capacity' could be the key to this process. This will be beneficial for the gap found between strategy formulation and implementation.

The establishment of a social media strategy seems to be fairly poor and easily formulated by 75% of the companies. Tree out of four companies attach a lot of value to content alignment based on the core values of the company. Noticeable is that the best performing company in terms of explicit strategy use that meet up with a lot of aspects as suggested by the literature, does not share the importance of this factor. Instead of focusing on content alignment based on core values, this company strives for activity alignment for the complete e-commerce environment. However, besides the focus of activity alignment between for the complete e-commerce environment, this company also mentions content alignment with the core values of the company. It is interesting to see that all companies attach a lot of value to content alignment based on the core values of the company. However, solely content alignment based on the core values of the company does not seem to be an efficient method for the strategy formulation. The companies that have a poorly formulated strategy seem to lack the necessary marketing information.

In sum, based on the evaluation of the author of this research most companies do not use a social media strategy. In addition, most 'strategies' seem to be emergent. However, a complete planned social media strategy seems to be inefficient due to the fast changing online environment. It is noticeable that most companies lack explicit organizational goals for social media. In addition, two out of tree explicit strategies seem to lack representativeness. Companies unconsciously use a lot of aspects as suggested by the social media strategy canvas. However, this does not appear to be the case for aspects according to the social media implementation framework. Tree out of four companies seem to have a too simplistic way of strategy establishment with the lack of marketing information. All companies attach a lot of value to content alignment based on the core values of the company.

# 6. Discussion

In this chapter the results of the case analysis, cross analysis and literature are compared to look further beyond just the findings. According to the literature there is a gap between social media strategy formulation and social media implementation. This gap was confirmed in the case analysis of the research paper. The social media strategy canvas is a merger of all factors as found in the literature regarding social media strategy formulation. In addition, the literature review revealed important factors regarding social media implementation. Based upon new insights such as the need of a not too comprehensive, yet explicit strategy, and the need of a strategy that leaves space to react on uncertainties and opportunities, the social media strategy canvas is a very interesting framework for enrichment. Due to the optimal conditions to merge social media strategy with social media implementation in a not too comprehensive canvas, a light will be shed on the first enrichment of the social media strategy canvas based on new insights of this research.

**Table 10. Social media strategy implementation canvas (Effing, Spil, ter Stal, 2018)**

ENGAGE

ENABLE

| Goals | Channels | Partners | Capacity |
|---|---|---|---|
| Write down organizational goals for social media. Ensure measurement options. | What are appropriate social media channels, ensure channel synergy. | Find partnerships for social media. Check for saturation monthly. | Determine social media FTE's or social hours, social media is not a side thing. Consider social media (online) marketer. |
| **Target groups** Write down the target audience(s) you want reach trough social media. | **Content** Determine content for target audiences, ensure content based on core values, ensure activity alignment, set activity calendar goals. | **Resources** Determine financial funds, education and advertising. Write down education goals and advertisement targets. | **Policies** Write down rules, guidelines and restrictions for social media controller(s). |
| **ROI** Make sure to determine a way to measure ROI. CPL, CPC, CTR, ROPO. | **Monitoring** Ensure quantitative and qualitative metrics for monitoring. (Design metrics to measure both community traditional outcomes) | **Governance** Assign formal responsibility and targets for the social media controller. Determine increase or decrease social media FTE or hours. Also assign formal responsibility for content creation. | **Strategy formulation** Make the complete social media strategy canvas explicit. Ensure a strategy that can be innovated fast. Ensure a strategy on a business level. Ensure organizational goals can be measured. |
| **Tools** Ensure social media tool use for customer observation. | **Strategy** What have we reached with social media, is it working? What needs to be improved? * Strategy optimization | **Community building** Ensure continuality in engaging content, provide incentives for participation. Be sensitive to norms/policies. Balance freedom with control and accountability. | **Mindful adoption** Ensure a strategy. Ensure applications are easy to find. Ensure monitoring. Ensure 'house rules' for use. Ensure adoption assessment. |

EVALUATE

EXECUTE

This social media strategy implementation canvas is an expansion of the social media strategy canvas of Effing and Spil (2016). This canvas is a merger of new insights as found in this research, the social media strategy canvas and the social media implementation framework. The original social media strategy canvas can be found in chapter 2.6 Figure 5. Important aspects that formed the basis to build the new social media strategy implementation canvas are:

- The lack of a proper establishment process for social media strategies.
- The need of explicit organizational goals.
- The need of an explicit social media strategy.
- Insights on emergent versus planned social media strategies.
- The need of an efficient social media implementation plan.
- The need of mindful adoption decisions when implementing new platforms or innovations.
- The need of a more activating canvas.
- The need of responsibility assignment.

The overarching aspect 'execute' should activate a better strategy social media strategy formulation, implementation, realization, and evaluation. First of all the aspect 'execute' should activate more evaluation of the social media strategy rather then solely being based on return on investment and monitoring. This should lead to a better strategy optimization. One of the main findings of this research paper is that the strategy establishment process is too simplistic. One of the reasons seems to be that companies rely to heavily on content alignment based on the core values of the company rather then on marketing information. In addition, these 'strategies' are not explicit. This causes a lack in measurement options. Therefore, in the expanded social media organizational goals need to be explicit to ensure measurement options. Therefore the aspect strategy formulation is added in the canvas. This should activate a complete social media strategy. In addition it reminds the user to

ensure a strategy that has a certain business level. To accomplish a more serious attitude towards goal realization governance is added in the canvas. Formal responsibility should be assigned to an employee(s) for monitoring social media based on the objectives for social media. In addition, responsibility should be assigned to an employee(s) for content creation. In addition, to activate the aspects of the social media strategy canvas, 'ensure' has been added to some sub-aspects of the overarching aspects 'engage', 'enable' and 'evaluate'.

An outcome of this research is that there is almost no efficient social media implementation according to the literature. Therefore the social media implementation framework is implemented in the new canvas. The added aspects are: governance (absorptive capacity), 'community building' and 'mindful adoption decisions'. These aspects activate both social media strategy formulation and social media implementation. Furthermore it is important to have a strategy that is not too comprehensive and leaves space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, optimization and new opportunities. Another aspect that is added to the canvas is the need to develop both quantitative and qualitative metrics for measuring the value of social media applications. In the old social media strategy canvas this was not emphasized. This social media strategy canvas has a more activating role then the old social media strategy canvas. Instead of asking a question of what metrics are being checked, this canvas activates a more demanding side. For example: for monitoring they should use both quantitative and qualitative metrics. Based on the insights of this research it became clear that not all companies use a tool such as OBI4Wan for monitoring (listening). Therefore, to optimize social media for business purposes, a tool for monitoring is highly recommended.

Based on the collected data, it seems that are younger people (18-29) are chosen to control social media marketing. In addition, when looking at the cases of this research paper, there might be a connection between the function of the social media controller and the way a strategy is established. It might suggest that if a person has a more specific role such as social media marketing manager, more formal responsibility for social media targets and accomplishments is assigned to this person. The formal responsibility and targets might increase the need of a proper social media strategy implementation. There also might be a connection between the quality of the strategy and the time of establishment. Based on the cases of this research, the only company that performed well in terms of strategy implementation according to the literature was the only company who established their strategy before social media implementation. However, this is just speculation about potential indicators.

In terms of mindful adoption decisions, only one company had an adequate mindful adoption process. Therefore, in case of new platforms popping up in the online environment, a company should operationalize mindful adoption decisions. When looking at the outcomes of the cases in this research, it seems that there is no need for a comprehensive social media strategy. How contradictive this might sound, there seems to be a need of a simple, yet complete and explicit strategy. This is caused by needs of a fast changing social media environment. The social media strategies must leave space to react to uncertainty, to experiment, optimization and new opportunities. Although the companies fill in some parts of the social media strategy canvas and social media implementation framework unconsciously, there are too many blanks to assume that every company will always unconsciously fill in aspects for an efficient social media strategy implementation. Therefore, this social media strategy implementation canvas needs to be easily found on (social media) marketing information websites rather then literature databases. This is important due to the fact none of the interviewed companies search for information in literature studies on how to establish or implement a social media strategy. Companies seem to base social media operationalization heavily on content alignment based on core values. This is interesting due to the fact the worst performing companies in this case study regarding social media strategy implementation seem to do this. In comparison, the best performing company relies more on activity alignment between all e-commerce channels and relies on marketing models. Furthermore it is interesting to see that the worst performing companies formulate a lot of their own strategy based on the social media of other companies. In comparison, the best performing company does not look towards social media of other companies to formulate their own strategy. There seems to be a lack of common understanding of important factors for social media strategy (implementation). This is both shown in the literature study, as well as in the case studies of this research paper. Due to the fast changing environment of social media it is expected that new factors will be found continually. As a rule of thumb the social media strategy implementation canvas seems to be a good basis for an efficient social media use for business purposes. Furthermore it seems that there is not enough goal realization among the goals set in the activity content calendars of the companies. Therefore it could be useful to assign formal responsibility to keep track of the goals for the activity content calendars.

# 7. Limitations and further research

In this chapter the limitations of this research paper will be discussed combined with interesting suggestions for new research topics. The goal of this research paper was to gain insights in the use, the process of establishment and operationalization of a social media strategy. This has been done through conducting a literature study and semi-structured interviews with social media controllers of regional best practice SMEs in the Netherlands. As only four cases have been analyzed (statistical) generalization is not possible. A limitation of this research was 'time'. The timeframe for this research paper was set to 6 months of research in the field of social media marketing. If this timeframe was expanded, more interviews could have been done. According to Yin (2014), survey research relies on statistical generalization, whereas case studies rely on analytical generalization. This is applicable for this research paper. The case study does not represent a "sample", and the investigators goal is to expand and generalize theories and not to enumerate frequencies, as done in this study. However, according Yin (2014) case studies provide little basis for scientific generalization, therefore this research paper has a more practical informing role towards social media use for business purposes. In addition, the semi-structured interviews were individually based. These cases are individually based and are not generalizable. This might have an impact on the austerity of the results. A side note must be made that all respondents have decision-making authority and are highly involved in the social media strategy process. The literature research was used to build a research framework in terms of strategy comparison for the cross-case analysis. Furthermore, the literature research was used to form the conceptual framework. The literature research was more extensive then the case studies. During the literature research a total of thirty-nine articles were used compared to four case studies. Chapter 1.2 in this research paper consists of a prognosis regarding the importance of social media for business purposes. Due to a lack of information in the literature on the prognosis of social media, this prognosis might be inaccurate. Furthermore it was difficult to determine whether or not a company used a social media strategy. This is due to the fact that there is no clear understanding of the definition social media strategy. Therefore, this causes problems for the generalizability of this research. Another limitation of this research was during the time of social media research, a new privacy law went into operation as of the 25th of May. This new privacy law has an influence on the ways data collection of social media. This can directly and indirectly influence the list of important factors for a social media strategy or for social media implementation.

This research serves as a basis for pre-study for researchers who want to research more into the field of social media strategies, social media strategy establishment, emergent versus planned social media strategies, and social media strategy use by SMEs. Researchers can use this study to gain insights in the actual use of social media strategies in practice. This research has opened a very interesting discussion regarding strategy use for new social media platforms.

Interesting topics for further research are:

- Comparison of ROI differences between emergent versus planned strategy use.
- Why there is a lack of knowledge of social media frameworks and models as suggested by literature.
- What the potential benefits could be of implementing the social media strategy (implantation) canvas.
- What the potential benefits could be of making an explicit social media strategy.
- Why companies lack in making a social media strategy explicit.

This research paper serves as a basis for larger scaled research towards development of social media strategy. In addition, this research serves as a basis in the search of synergy optimization between social media strategy formulation and implementation. There seems to be a lack of information in literature on how companies actually implement social media. Therefore, researchers in this field should do a larger scaled research. By investigating the synergy between social media strategy formulation implementation, optimization of social media use for business purposes can be achieved.

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# Appendix I - figures

**Figure 1. Usage of social media, following frequencies (Pew Research, 2018)**
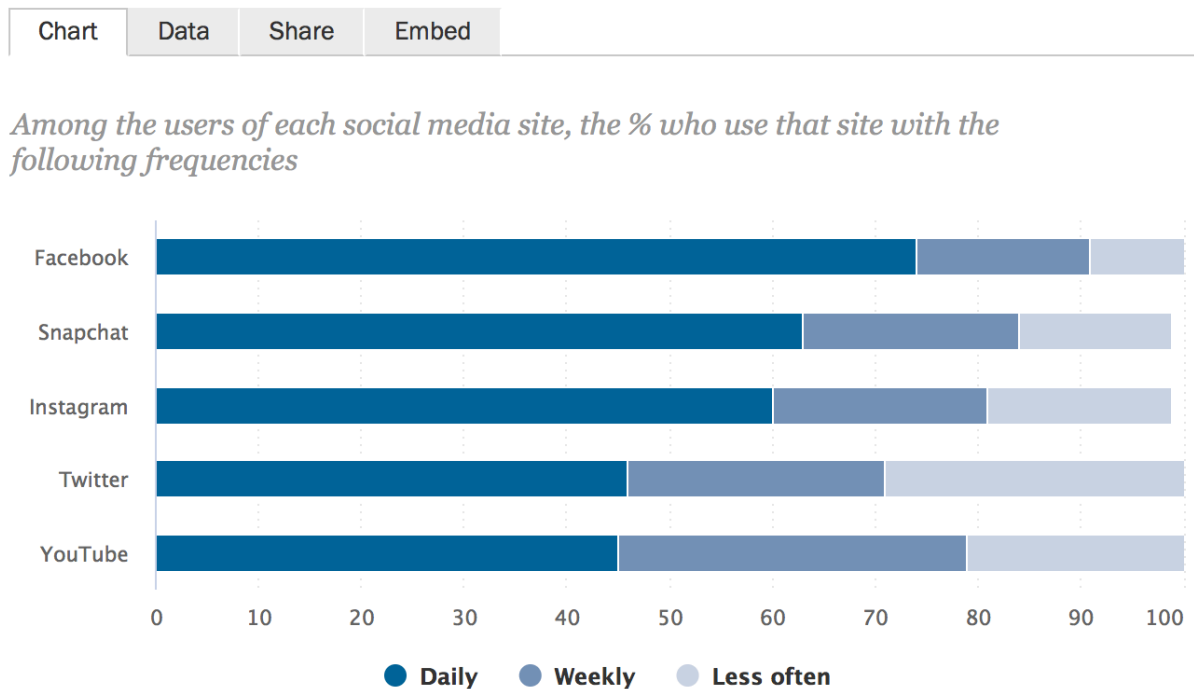


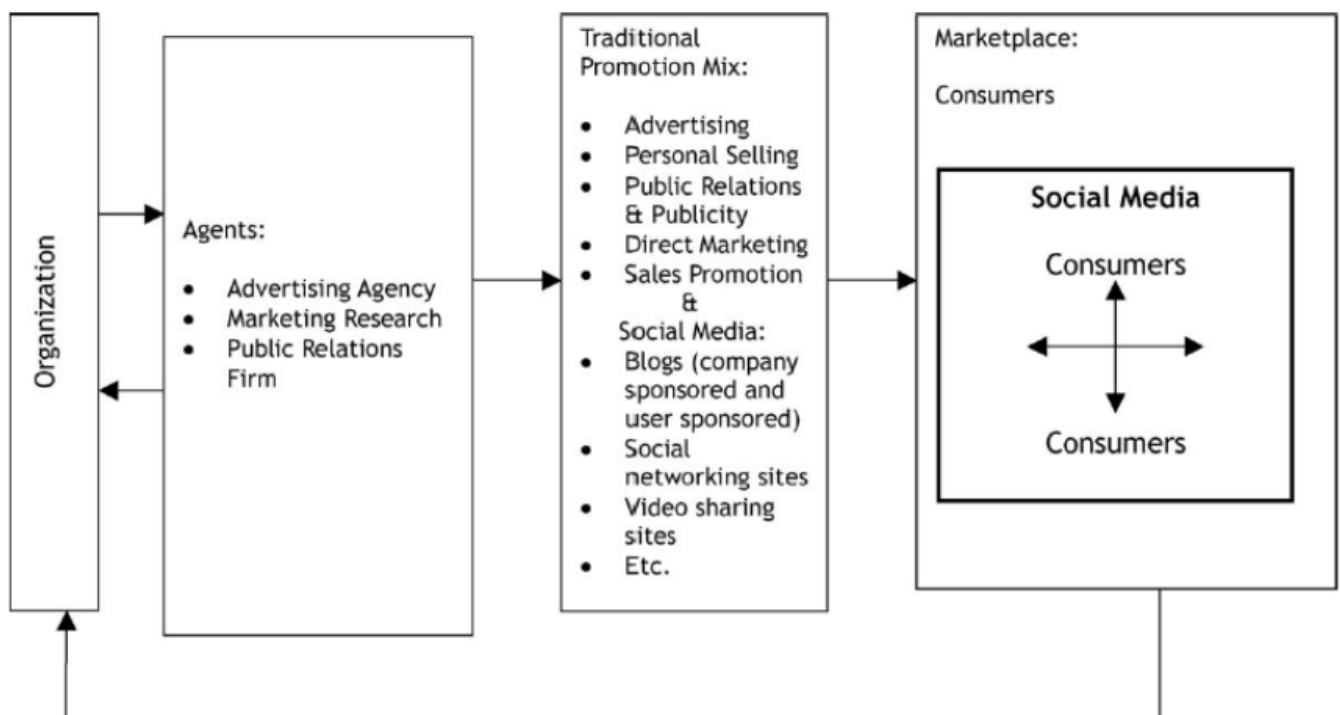**Figure 2. The new communications paradigm (Mangold and Faulds (2009)**

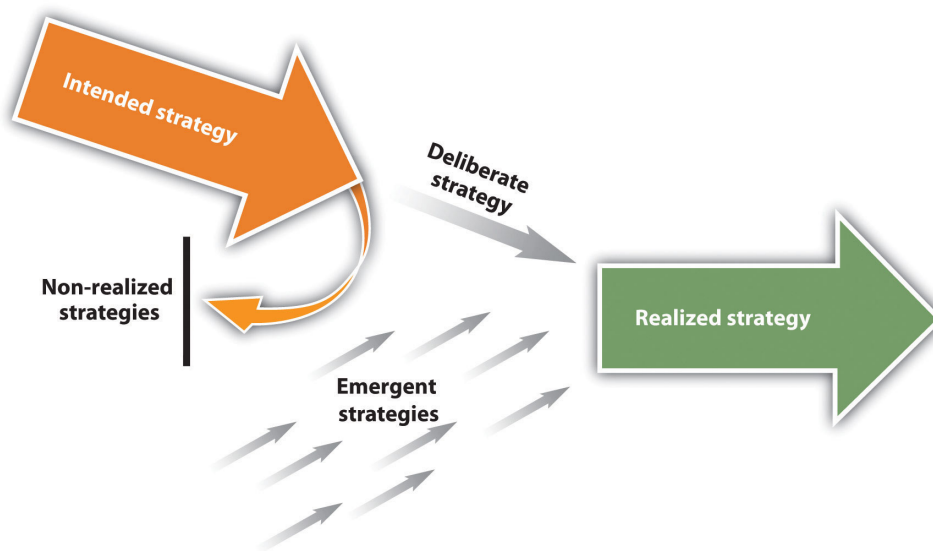**Figure 3. Deliberate versus Emergent strategies (Mintzberg et al. 2003)**



**Figure 4. Discontinuity brought on by disruption and "jumping" curve. [2]**
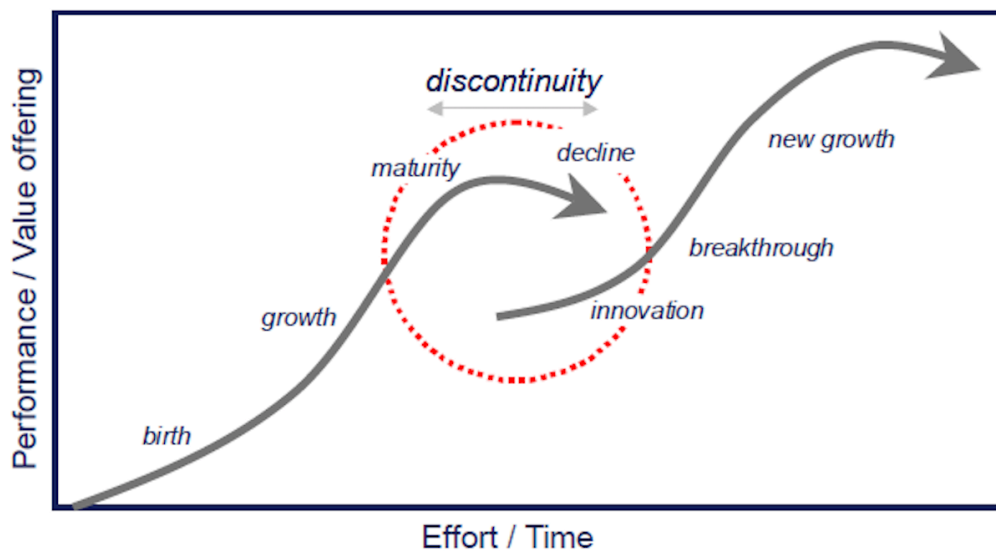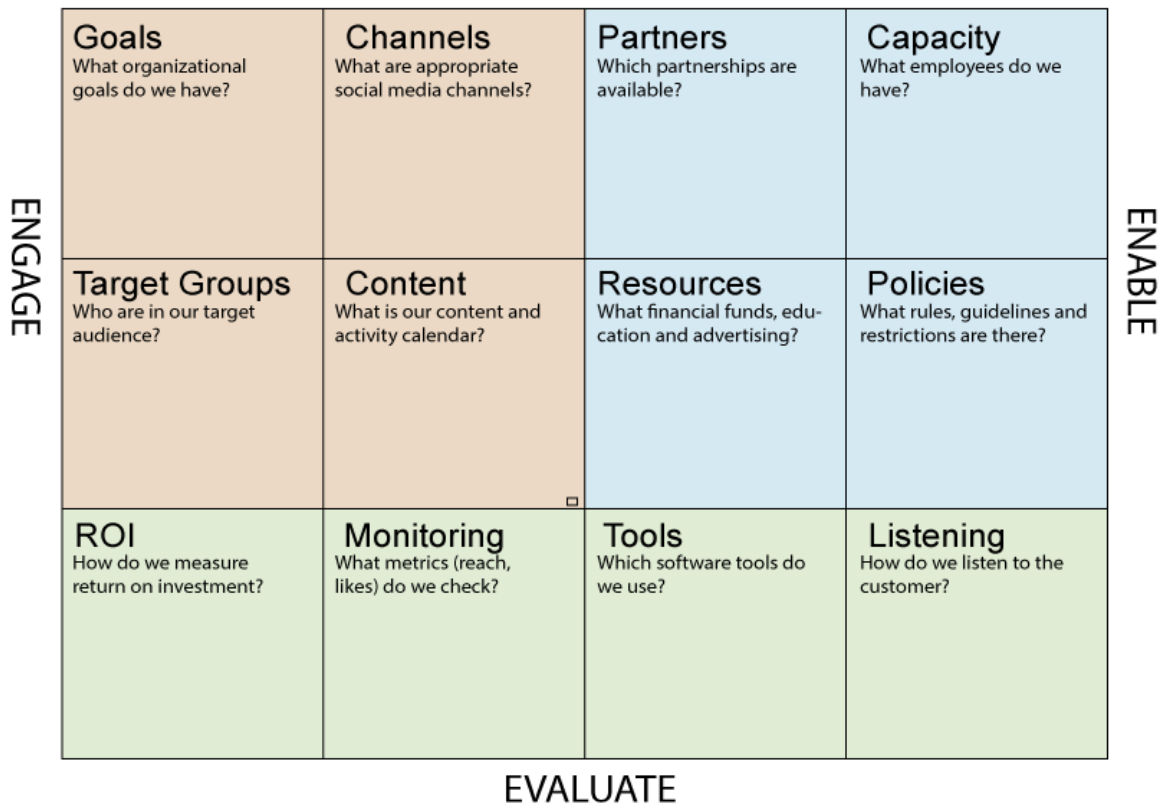
**Figure 5. Social media strategy Canvas (Effing and Spil, 2016)**



## Appendix II - tables

**Table 1. Comparison of models and frameworks**

| Factors | Culnan et al. (2010) | Effing and Spil (2016) | Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Organizational goals** | | x | |
| Target groups | | x | |
| Content | x | x | |
| Social media channel | x | x | x |
| Partners | | x | |
| Capacity | x | x | |
| Resources | | x | |
| Policies | x | x | |
| Return on Investment | | x | |
| Monitoring | x (complete) | x (partly) | |
| Tools | | x | |
| Listening to customers | | x | |
| **Application ease** | x | | x |
| risk management | x | | |
| Contiually populate site | x | | x |
| Incentives participation | x | | |
| Company mentioning conversations | x | | |
| Freedom and control balance | x | | |
| Sensitive to norms | x | | |
| Responsibility assignment | x | | |
| Building on existings processes | x | | |
| Strucutre messages | x | | |
| Share knowledge across firm | x | | |
| **Activity alingment** | | | x |
| Media plan integration | x | | x |
| Access for all | | | x |
| Advice on social media posts | | | x |

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**Table 2. Conceptual framework**

| | |
|---|---|
| Planned strategy use | Effing and Spil (2016)<br>Mintzberg et al. (2003) |
| Emergent strategy use | Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)<br>Mintzberg et al. (2003)<br>Partly uknown (research) |
| Implementation | Culnan et al. (2010)<br>Partly Haenlein and Kaplan (2010) |
| Realized Strategy | Effing and Spil (2016)<br>Culnan et al. (2003)<br>Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)<br>Mintzberg et al. (2003) |
| Evaluation | Effing and Spil (2016)<br>Culnan et al. (2010) |

**Table 3. Information regarding the social media decision makers of the companies**

| Respondent | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Function | Online Marketing Manager | Marketer | Marketer | Operational Marketing Manager |
| Age | 25 | 24 | 25 | 28 |
| Experience * | 3 | 1,5 | 2 | 1,5 |

\* Years of experience in the field of social media marketing / marketing

**Table 4. Time of strategy or guideline establishment**

| When is a strategy or guideline established | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Before social media implementation | x | | | |
| During social media implementation | | | | x |
| After social media implementation | | x | x | |

**Table 5. Literature/data matrix**

| Literature/data matrix | Social media strategy canvas Effing and Spil (2016) | | | Mindful adoption Culnan et al. (2010) | Social media implementation Culnan et al. (2010), Kaplan and Haenlein | Activity alignment Kaplan and Haenlein |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Engage | Enable | Evaluate | | | |
| Case A | Good | Good | Good | Adequate | Adequate | Good |
| Case B | Adequate | Poor | Poor | Poor | Poor | Adequate |
| Case C | Inadequate | Poor | Adequate | Poor | Poor | Inadequate |
| Case D | Good | Poor | Inadequate | Inadequate | Inadequate | Good |

**Table 6. Emergent or planned social media activities**

| Strategy | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Planned or emergent | Both | Emergent | Emergent | Emergent |
| Implicit or explicit | Explicit | Explicit * | Implicit | Explicit * |

**Table 7. Strategy realization and difficulty of strategy**

| | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strategy realization | Full | 90% | Almost none | Full |
| Difficulty of strategy | Comprehensive | Simplistic | Easy | Easy |

**Table 8. Strategy use based on evaluation**

| Use of social media strategy | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | x | | | |
| No | | x | x | x |

**Table 9. Evaluated choice of denominaton**

| Evaluated choice of denomination | Case A | Case B | Case C | Case D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit social media strategy | x | | | |
| Implicit social media strategy | | | x | x |
| Implicit social media plan | | x | | |

**Table 10. Social media strategy implementation canvas**

| Goals | Channels | Partners | Capacity |
|---|---|---|---|
| Write down organizational goals for social media. Ensure measurement options. | What are appropriate social media channels, ensure channel synergy. | Find partnerships for social media. Check for saturation monthly. | Determine social media FTE's or social hours, social media is not a side thing. Consider social media (online) marketer. |
| **Target groups** Write down the target audience(s) you want reach trough social media. | **Content** Determine content for target audiences, ensure content based on core values, ensure activity alignment, set activity calendar goals. | **Resources** Determine financial funds, education and advertising. Write down education goals and advertisement targets. | **Policies** Write down rules, guidelines and restrictions for social media controller(s). |
| **ROI** Make sure to determine a way to measure ROI. CPL, CPC, CTR, ROPO. | **Monitoring** Ensure quantitative and qualitative metrics for monitoring. (Design metrics to measure both community traditional outcomes) | **Governance** Assign formal responsibility and targets for the social media controller. Determine increase or decrease social media FTE or hours. Also assign formal responsibility for content creation. | **Strategy formulation** Make the complete social media strategy canvas explicit. Ensure a strategy that can be innovated fast. Ensure a strategy on a business level  Ensure organizational goals can be measured. |
| **Tools** Ensure social media tool use for customer observation. | **Strategy** What have we reached with social media, is it working? What needs to be improved?  * Strategy optimization | **Community building** Ensure continuality in engaging content, provide incentives for participation  Be sensitive to norms/policies  Balance freedom with control and accountability. | **Mindful adoption** Ensure a strategy Ensure applications are easy to find.  Ensure monitoring  Ensure 'house rules' for use  Ensure adoption assessment. |

EVALUATE                    EXECUTION

# Appendix III – Interview Framework

**Part I** (Introduction) **8 minutes**

1. Introduction of the interviewer
2. The purpose of the interview and a short overview of the questions that will be asked
3. The interviewer will ask the respondent for permission to record the interview, and guarantee the anonymity of the respondent.
4. From here on the voice recorder will start
5. Information about the respondent
   a. Name
   b. Age
   c. Years of experience in the field of marketing/social media marketing
   d. Relation regarding decision making in the field of social media decisions

   Information about the company:
6. What field business is the company you are working for active in?
7. What was the reason your department or organization began to use social media?
8. What role does social media play in your business?

**Part II** (Social media strategy, Effing and Spil (2016) **15 minutes**

9. What organizational goals do you have with social media for business purposes?
10. Can you describe in your own words, what in your opinion a social media strategy is?
11. If you used a "strategy", was this a strategy put on paper, was the strategy in the mind or was this found on the internet/literature, if so, which one?
12. To what extent is the adoption of a social media (strategy) part of the (strategy) of the marketing/sales department?
13. What are in your opinion key factors for an efficient social media strategy?
14. Was outsourcing of social media tasks ever considered or done? If so, for what social media tasks do you collaborate with partners?
15. What social media platforms do you use for your business, and why these specific platforms?
16. What is your target audience?
17. What do you do for monitoring social media?

**Part III** (Adoption, organization. Culnan et al. 2012) **10 minutes**

18. Before implementing social media, was there mindful adoption of social media? (Explain mindful adoption, Culnan et al. 2012) → This outcome of this will also tell if the use of social media was unplanned or planned.
19. Can you describe the process to create a social media (activity) calendar?
20. Of all content you made, what is your favorite and why?
21. What tools do you use to manage your channels?
22. Do you measure ROI for social media?
23. If question 22 is yes, what metrics did you have? If not, how do you measure ROI for social media?
24. In your eyes, what are the key factors for the use of social media?

**Part IV** (Mainly Emergent strategy, a small piece of Kaplan) **8 minutes**
25. Can you describe activities on social media which happened without a strategy that are emergent?
26. To what extent are you aware of what the competition does on social media?
27. What do you think currently can be improved in the social media efforts?
28. Do you check the latest updates, innovations, and new platforms in social media? If so, how do you check it?

**Part V** (Strategy realization) **5 minutes**
29. In all the time of active social media, what is operationalized of the strategy?
30. Why did part x of the strategy did not come true?
31. Does social media in your company mainly comes forth out of emergent activities or from a social media strategy?

**Part VI** (Ending interview)

32. Would you like to add something as a closing to the interview?