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Critical success factors in using visual social media as social commerce platforms

The case of Instagram and Pinterest

Master Thesis
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Abstract

Purpose
The purpose of the study was to identify critical success factors for using visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms. The platforms of focus were Instagram and Pinterest as these are one of the fastest growing visual social media platforms. Thereby, these two platforms have been used as a basis for arriving at general CSFs for using visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms.

Methodology
To assess the current state of literature regarding critical success factors a literature review has been conducted. During the literature study critical success factors have been identified and were later combined with findings from semi-structured interviews with seven experts in the field of social media marketing.

Findings
The findings reveal a set of six critical success factors related to utilizing visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms namely *Content, Interaction and Engagement, Frequency, Optimisation of the Profile, Right Ad Targeting and Strategy*. Thereby, strategy is seen as critical success factor based on a higher, strategic level, whereas the other factor are rather on an operational level. Moreover, critical success factors specifically related to Instagram and Pinterest has also been provided.

Theoretical and practical implications
The study complements existing literature with CSFs regarding the usage of visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms, which was previously only explored for social media in general. Further, it sheds light on what companies should actively do in practice in order to succeed on social commerce, whereas the previous body of research on social commerce primary focuses on defining the topic as well as determining factors regarding the adoption of social commerce by consumers.

Limitations and further research
Limitations of this study basically come from the nature of qualitative research meaning that they are only based on the seven expert opinions, which could have led to sampling bias. However, the critical success factors have emerged from combining insights from literature and experts, but are not tested in a quantitative study. Therefore, further research could verify the result in a quantitative study or a case study, where the CSFs are tested in practice.

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Abbreviations

CSF = Critical Success Factor
UGC = User-generated Content
SEO = Search Engine Optimization

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1. Introduction

It is no secret that social media has changed the way companies as well as consumers communicate, create, consume and collaborate (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013; Yilmaz & Enginkaya, 2015) and that the development of the social media and e-commerce world is continuously changing. Social media are developing more and more into so-called social commerce platforms as users are getting the possibility of shopping within the platforms itself. Moreover, current statistics reveal that especially visual social media platforms are growing enormously as there is a change from text-based social media to visual social media like Instagram and Pinterest and both platforms, Instagram and Pinterest, are one of the fastest growing social media platforms (Koss, 2018; Lenz, 2017). However, especially Pinterest is still to a certain extent underestimated by companies, even though experts are still predicting its growing importance (Koss, 2018).

This development offers many opportunities for existing businesses and start-up companies that come up with new business ideas. In today's business environment, more and more companies build up their success story through social media marketing as they especially use visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms. One example is the German brand Kapten & Son, who used Instagram as a social commerce platform together with focused Influencer Marketing for building up a loyal and converting brand community (Kobilke, 2017). Kapten & Son now counts about 600.000 loyal followers on Instagram and Facebook. With such huge numbers of followers, social media has a significant implication for business. Social media platforms like Instagram therefore offer huge opportunities for companies to reach their preferred set of consumers and are increasingly introducing social commerce opportunities. The fact that especially on Instagram consumers have a quite positive attitude towards advertisements (Kobilke, 2017), makes it easier for companies to integrate social commerce on this platform.

This relatively new trend named "social commerce" can be described as a sort of commerce that is mediated by social media (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Sood (2012) even predicts the death of pure social media and the rise of social commerce entailing all complex interactions amongst customers and commerce without borders. However, little is known about the critical success factors that need to be in place when using the visual social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest as social commerce platforms. Even though it cannot be neglected that for brands to have a huge community on Instagram Influencer marketing might play an important role.

Therefore, investigating critical success factors in relation to utilizing visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms is an important research topic. Even though many companies, both large companies as well as start-ups, already use Instagram and Pinterest as social media platforms and also imply its social

commerce opportunities, little is known about the critical success factors to use these two visual social media channels as social commerce platforms.

The study will be done in cooperation with a start-up company in the home textiles industry and a corresponding recommendation to use the social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest as social commerce platforms will be provided for the company.

1.1. Research question

This leads to the following central research question of this paper:

What are critical success factors (CSF) for using the visual social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest as social commerce platforms?

In answering the research question the following sub-questions will be investigated to supplement the answer for the overall research question.

> *Sub-questions:*
> *What is social commerce?*
> *What are visual social media platforms and what are the most important ones?*
> *What platform, Instagram or Pinterest, has the highest potential regarding social commerce?*
> *What are critical success factors (CSF) for using Instagram as social commerce platform?*
> *What is the role of Influencer Marketing on Instagram as a social commerce platform?*
> *What are critical success factors (CSF) for using Pinterest as social commerce platform?*
> *How should the critical success factors be applied within a start-up company in the home textiles industry?*

The goal of the paper is to investigate critical success factors in using Instagram and Pinterest as social commerce platforms. The above mentioned sub-questions will supplement the answer for the overall research questions. The main research question will be split into Instagram and Pinterest each in order to also analyse each platform separately. Due to the fact that Influencer Marketing has gained of importance and popularity, especially on social media platforms like Instagram, it has been decided to include it as a separate sub-question of this paper.

Finally, the last sub-question will deal with implementing the defined critical success factors for a case company, which is a start-up in the home textiles industry.

1.2. Outline of the Thesis

A literature review will serve as a basis for investigating current research followed by semi-structured interviews with experts in the field. The results will then be examined, critical success factors will be defined and implications for the case start-up company will be given.

The paper will start with a description of the applied methodology including methods for data collection and data analysis. Afterwards, the results of the literature review will be described in a theory section. Results as well as discussion and conclusion will follow. The study ends with implications for further research and limitations.

1.3. Academic and Practical Relevance

This paper offers both, theoretical and practical contributions due to the fact that it deals with a hot topic for researchers and business people as the relevance of social commerce cannot be neglected for both parties. The number of studies regarding social commerce is continuously increasing (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017), but research on social commerce remains rather focused on defining the topic as well as determining factors regarding the adoption of social commerce by consumers (Gatautis & Medziausiene, 2014; Lal, 2017). Also, research mainly focuses on social media platforms like Facebook as the network was one of the first movers in social commerce, but neglects other, especially visual platforms like Instagram and Pinterest. Due to the fact that Facebook is not the most relevant platform anymore, at least when companies want to reach people organically, it is of high relevance to undertake research on other platforms as well.
Therefore, through the clear focus of social commerce on the growing visual social media platforms in combination with effects of social influencing this research incorporates three state-of-the art topics.

This paper theoretically contributes to existing literature by offering critical success factors regarding the usage of Instagram and Pinterest as social commerce platforms. While current studies focus on the general developments of social commerce and corresponding criteria regarding user acceptance, this paper clearly focuses on the two most relevant visual social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest. The outcome of this research is therefore academically relevant.

Further, it offers practical contributions for existing companies in providing them with critical success factors that businesses can directly apply in their daily business. While additionally providing advice for an existing start-up company the critical success factors will be directly applied in the business context. However, in the end not only start-ups will profit from the identified success factors, but for sure also existing and established companies.

2. Methodology

The methodology part of this thesis will be split into two parts: (1) Literature review and (2) Qualitative research with semi-structured interviews. The following section thereby describes the methodology part in detail.

2.1. Literature Review

Literature Review. The first part will comprise a literature review partly using the five-stage process by Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller, and Wilderom (2013) entailing the following stages (1) Define, (2) Search, (3) Select, (4) Analyse and (5) Present.
In the first step the scope of the literature review will be defined meaning that the keywords will be chosen and databases for analyses will be selected. In this case Scopus as well as Google Scholar will be used as the database. Due to the fact that the study will deal with a relatively new topic the literature review will be limited to a time frame from 2005 till 2018. Fields like "medicine" as well as "engineering" and "mathematics", that are not relevant for the topic have been excluded. In order to ensure that the full range of relevant articles will be selected both broad as well as narrow search terms will be used for further analysis. For example, "Social Media" in general will serve as a broader term, whereas "Social Commerce" and "Instagram" will work for searching for niche articles especially fitting to the specific topic of the study. In a second step the actual search phase of articles will take place, where the selected search terms will be investigated in the selected databases. The database Scopus offers a nice tool for organising the found literature, screening the abstracts and finally selecting the relevant articles, which represents step 4. After the final selection of articles the selected ones will be analysed and their contributions will be presented during the theory section.

Due to the fact that social media marketing and social commerce are relatively new issues and new topics around social media arise every day, it would be risky to only focus on journal articles of academic databases. Moreover, during the first round of searching for fitting articles it was noticed that more practical literature needs to be in place especially for defining critical success factors as offered by literature. Therefore, next to databases also other sources like books and relevant articles in professional magazines written from professionals and experts have been used in this literature research as they often provide the newest insights.
Using sources other than academic sources is especially important due to the fast-changing nature of social media in itself, where new features like Instagram Shopping are introduced continuously and are not yet studied by research in journal papers. However, only web sources from reliable web pages, magazines or blogs have been used and included in the literature review.
Combining both academic databases and other literature sources will lead to a well-developed theory section.

Further, the literature review will serve as a basis for defining critical success factors as explained in paragraph 2.2.5.

2.2. Qualitative Study

The second part of this study will be based on qualitative research as this research is to a certain extent on exploratory level. According to Babbie (2007) one of the purposes of exploratory research is to get a better understanding of a specific phenomenon of the researchers interest, which fits to the purpose of this study. This study aims at getting a better understanding of the critical success factors when it comes to the usage of visual social media platforms like Pinterest and Instagram as social commerce platforms. Therefore, qualitative research was chosen over quantitative research as qualitative research uses an inductive approach and rather generates theory in comparison to quantitative research, which uses a deductive approach and rather tests theory (Bryman, 2004).

2.2.1. Data collection

For the data collection, seven semi-structured interviews are chosen in order to investigate the research topic and identify a list of critical success factors. It is important to hear detailed opinions from the experts, wherefore it would not make sense to do a quantitative questionnaire. According to Babbie (2007) "contrasted with survey interviewing, the qualitative interview is based on a set of topics to be discussed in depth rather than based on the use of standardized questions", which fits the goal of this research.

Therefore, semi-structured interviews are chosen, because they offer the opportunity for asking more in-depth questions while every interview is still structured in the same, but still offers flexibility. According to Rabionet (2009, p. 203) "qualitative interviewing is a flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experiences", which underlines the goal of the study. Further, semi-structured interviews are useful when the researcher wants to lead the interview into a certain direction, but is still open-minded for new input (Rabionet, 2009). In this case, the goal is to get to know critical success factors in using Instagram and Pinterest as social commerce platforms, wherefore the interviewee will be pushed into that direction to a certain extent, but is still free to tell his own opinion in detail.

2.2.2. Subjects for Study

Subjects for study will be seven experts in the fields of Social Media Marketing and Social Commerce. Having seven experts in place will lead to enough different opinions, while still ensuring that the interviews can be really done in-depth. Experts are either consultants in the specific topics or managers in the field who work for companies. They have been selected based on their experience in the field of social media marketing and social commerce. Thereby the researcher

ensures that interviewees are real experts in the field and are therefore a valid source of information. Experts will be approached via telephone or E-mail, the research topic will be explained and if interest is shown a date for the interview will be made. Interviewees can decide whether they want to do the interview personally or via telephone, but they will be informed that personal interviews are preferred by the researcher.

Respondent	Position
Expert 1	Social Media Manager
Expert 2	Social Media Consultant
Expert 3	Social Media and Online Marketing Consultant
Expert 4	Social Media Consultant
Expert 5	Social Media Consultant
Expert 6	Social Media Manager
Expert 7	Social Media Manager

Table 1: Overview of Experts

In fact, seven extensive interviewees have been taken place of which all of them are experts in the field of Instagram and five of them are experts in Pinterest as well. The duration of the interviewees lasted about 30-45 minutes each, wherefore it was ensured that the interviewees have been deep enough to answer the questions in detail.

2.2.3. Measurements: Interview Structure

The interview will be structured as following: Firstly, the researcher will give an introduction and explain what is meant by critical success factors.

Afterwards, the general relevance of Instagram and Pinterest regarding social commerce and the reasons for that will be investigated. Further, it will be figured out which platform of the two the interviewee finds most relevant and why.

Afterwards, critical success factors regarding social commerce will be investigated separately for Instagram and Pinterest. In both cases, experts should mention what critical success factors are in their opinion important for Instagram as well as Pinterest and what is special for each platform. Additionally, the topic of Influencer Marketing will be explored in the context of Instagram.

Finally, it will be explored whether the defined critical success factors can also be applied in a start-up context, in order to apply the factors for the case company, or whether they need to be adjusted.

A detailed description of the interview guide with the specific interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

2.2.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is always about linking theory and analysis, wherefore Babbie (2007) defines qualitative analysis as "the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships."

Open coding will be used in order to derive at categorizations, more specifically critical success factors, by analysing the answers according to the questions asked. Open coding thereby refers to "the initial classification and labelling of concepts in qualitative data analysis. In open coding, the codes are suggested by the researchers' examination and questioning of the data." (Babbie, 2007, p. 385)
After the interviews have been conducted it will be checked whether a specific tool for further analysis is necessary or if the results can be analysed without a specific software.

After analysing the interviews in detail, the results will be combined with outcomes from the literature review in order to arrive at final critical success factors as described in the following paragraph.

2.2.5. Definition of Critical success factors

Critical success factors are defined as "those characteristics, conditions, or variables that when properly sustained, maintained, or managed can have a significant impact on the success of a firm competing in a particular industry." (Leidecker & Bruno, 1984, p. 24) Even though this definition is quite general, it was chosen to use this definition for this research as well. In the case of this research it is thus not the success of a firm competing in a particular industry but the success of using the visual social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest as social commerce platforms. Another definition comes from an article of the Harvard Business Review stating that "critical success factors thus are, for any business, the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organization. They are the few key areas where "things must go right" for the business to flourish. If results in these areas are not adequate, the organisation's efforts for the period will be less than desired (Rockart, 1979).
However, the success of social media marketing is often difficult to measure. Whether a company is operating successfully on social media or not mainly depends

on the predefined goal which has been set by the companies. Here, different goals are common of which the most important ones include brand awareness, customer retention as well as brand image (Caprano & Ergenzinger, 2013). During a study by Caprano and Ergenzinger (2013) success factors of social media marketing in SMEs were investigated and possible success factors were categorised into (1) organisational, (2) structural, (3) strategic and (4) operational. In contrast to that, this study will focus rather on the operational level in order to shed a light on these success factors in more detail instead of having a too broad picture.

In order to clarify what will be final critical success factor later on, it has been decided to combine insights of the literature review together with insights from the interviews. Therefore, only if a factor is mentioned in both parts, it will also lead to a critical success factor. However, it needs to be pointed out that this topic has not yet been investigated by literature in detail, wherefore it is still on exploratory level to a certain extent.

2.2.6. Reliability and Validity

The following paragraph will deal with the reliability and validity issues in relation to this study. What needs to be pointed out at first sight is that reliability and validity need to be treated differently in qualitative research in comparison to quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003). This is because "qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal, because naturalistic inquiry takes the research into the real world where people live and work, and because in-depth interviewing opens up what is inside people – qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests, and other quantitative methods." (Patton, 2002, p. 407)

Therefore, Golafshani (2003) uses the criteria as provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985) namely like: Credibility, Neutrality or Confirmability, Consistency or Dependability and Applicability or Transferability. Thereby, in qualitative research it is not only reliability, but other criteria that make up reliability. Further, trustworthiness of the researcher is regarded as highly relevant in this context (Golafshani, 2003).

Reliability handles whether the result would be the same if the study would be conducted in the context of another research and therefore would be performed again (Babbie, 2007). The data has been collected through interviews, wherefore the sampling could influence the result. However, the interviewee only selected interviewees without any relation between them, meaning that they are highly independent. Due to the fact that the study does not focus on a specific Industry, the results are applicable for every company, wherefore generalizability and transferability are regarded as high.

Validity describes whether the measure really measures what should be measured and therefore fits the concept (Babbie, 2007). Therefore, the interview guide

exactly fits to the concepts the researcher wants to investigate while ensuring a huge fit between the interview guide and the research questions. As already stated above the interview guide is included in Appendix A.

3. Theory

During this theory chapter, the most important theoretical constructs used for this study will be presented. In doing so this chapter will describe the terms social media, visual social media as well as social commerce as well as a pre-selection of critical success factors as identified by current literature. Afterwards, the findings from the theory section related to the critical success factors will be analysed and compared to the results of the interviews.

3.1. Web 2.0, Social Media and Social Media Marketing

Social media has its roots in the development of the so-called Web 2.0, which initially described the increasing internet activity and a newly independent behaviour of users (Bernecker & Beilharz, 2012), which did not exist before. Thereby, the direction of communication changed from a one-way communication from firms to consumers to a two-way communication between company and consumers (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

In literature, social media, Web 2.0 and social networking sites (SNS) are often used interchangeably as they are closely related. Although these terms have been defined differently in literature this paper will use one of the highest citied definition of social media from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61), who define social media as *"a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content."* This view is also shared by Constantinides (2014, p. 42) who defines social media *"as web 2.0 applications enabling the creation, editing and dissemination of user-generated content."* The importance of user-generated-content is further highlighted by Yilmaz and Enginkaya (2015), who agree that consumer generated content builds the core foundation of social media activities.

With social media marketing in general, companies try to make use of social media in order to reach their marketing goals (Kreutzer, 2018), which can reach from customer retention, over increasing brand awareness to customer acquisition (Bernecker & Beilharz, 2012).

Thereby, social media strategy is referred to as *"a goal-directed planning process for creating user generated content, driven by a group of Internet applications, to create a unique and valuable competitive position"* (Effing & Spil, 2016).

Social media can be used in different ways and allows users to exchange experiences, create and publish content for themselves or the public. Social media can be categorized into social networks, media-sharing-platforms, messenger services as well as blogs, online panels and online communities (Kreutzer, 2018).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified these categories according to social presence/ media richness theory and self-presentation/self-disclosure theory as shown in figure 1. They base their definition for social presence on the one that is provided by Short, Williams, and Christie (1979) and therefore state that "media differ in the degree of ''social presence''- defined as the acoustic, visual, and physical contact that can be achieved u– they allow to emerge between two communication partners. Social presence is influenced by the intimacy (interpersonal vs. mediated) and immediacy (asynchronous vs. synchronous) of the medium, and can be expected to be lower for mediated (e.g., telephone conversation) than interpersonal (e.g., face-to-face discussion) and for asynchronous (e.g., e-mail) than synchronous (e.g., live chat) communications" (p.61).

Additionally, media richness assumes that ambiguity and the reduction of uncertainty is the goal of any communication and media therefore differ in their degree of richness regarding the amount of information they transmit. Therefore, some media are more effective in resolving ambiguity and uncertainty than others (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Further, self-presentation and self-disclosure basically refer to the degree of presentation of people within social media. People therefore control their impressions others form of them (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Even though this matrix is a very highly cited one this classification is already eight years old and should therefore be treated with caution as new platforms are introduced every day. Nowadays, one can even divide social networking sites further into visual versus text-based social media for instance, which "requires researchers to broaden and diversify the way social media is examined and addressed." (Highfield & Leaver, 2016)

There is a clear shift from text-based social media to visual-based social media which is not only visible in the growth rates of corresponding platforms like Pinterest and Instagram but also on the joy of users as they often prefer visual-based platforms.

However, categorizing the two platforms of focus regarding this matrix one could state that both Instagram and Pinterest are high in media richness as users both come with specific goals even though their goals are a bit different. Further, Instagram is higher in self-presentation in comparison to Pinterest, because users are less aiming in creating a social presence on Pinterest, because Pinterest is more about ideas and inspiration.

Social presence/ Media richness			
	Low	**Medium**	**High**
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure — **High**	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure — **Low**	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Figure 1: Classifications of Social Media. Retrieved from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)

3.2. The increasing importance of visual social media platforms

Visual content plays a critical role in social media and e-commerce, but is especially important for the visual based social media platforms in which visuals build the key for success. Throughout the last years a clear shift from text-based social media to visual social media has been seen (Russmann & Svensson, 2017) as people are more likely to engage with visual content, which is due to the fact that it is easier for people to consume visual content as 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual (Digital Marketing Institute, 2017). People have thereby recognized that it is much easier for them to just take pictures instead of writing texts. Further, strong visuals are connecting with an audience faster and with more emotions than words alone (PWC, 2017).

Visual social media marketing is closely related to what is called visual storytelling. Visual storytelling can be described as the use of photos, videos and graphics to create a story around a brand. This trend is going to increase further while new social media platforms will enter the stage (Walter & Gioglio, 2015).

The importance of visual social media is underlined with the growth rate of Instagram and the increasing amount of content that is created online (Lenz, 2017). However, more and more companies adopt the need of more appealing visual content, which makes it even more important for firms to create high quality content to succeed on social media (Digital Marketing Institute, 2017). Moreover, the attention duration of users is continuously decreasing due to content overload (Rixecker, 2015), which makes it necessary to produce catchy and outstanding content.

3.2.1. Overview of current visual social media platforms

There are several social media platforms that can be categorized as visual social media platforms. In order to differentiate visual social media platform from other platforms one needs to point out what makes up visual social media platforms in itself, which is indeed its clear focus on visuals without simply allowing to post texts.

Thereby, one could group (1) Instagram, (2) Pinterest, (3) YouTube and (4) Snapchat into the most popular visual social media platforms. For sure, one could argue that Facebook is also visual, but it is still very text-based and due to its decreasing relevance in terms of engagement rates it is to a certain extent less relevant (Neumann, 2018). Twitter is mainly text-based wherefore it is directly excluded.

Due to the fact that Instagram and Pinterest are one of the fastest growing platforms, especially when compared to Facebook, which was former the medium with the highest growth rates, it has been decided to focus on Pinterest and Instagram during this study. Especially Pinterest has lots of hidden potential that is not yet discovered by many companies (Koss, 2018; Lenz, 2017).

YouTube has been excluded due to the fact that it works quite different as this platform focuses on video content only. Further, Snapchat has been excluded due to its declining growth as Instagram took over a lot of Snapchat users when introducing Instagram Stories. Today, Snapchat is only relevant for very young target groups.

The focus of this paper will therefore lie on the platforms Instagram and Pinterest as these are the most relevant visual social media platforms for the case company of this research as well as the fastest growing platforms.

3.3. From Social Media and E-Commerce to Social Commerce

3.3.1. The emergence of social commerce

The development of Web 2.0 and the increasing usage of social media have offered many new opportunities for traditional e-commerce and therefore have facilitated the growth of social commerce. Thus, the differentiation between traditional e-commerce and social commerce is the social aspect offered by social commerce, where users can interact with each other, share opinions and give recommendations (Chen & Shen, 2015; Wang & Zhang, 2012). Social commerce has emerged due to the growth of social media and its integration into e-commerce and the fact that power turns from sellers to buyers (Hajli & Sims, 2015). Thereby, social media has facilitated the growth of social commerce as consumers increasingly rely on recommendations and reviews given by others in social media. Here it comes to the important role of social influencing.

Recent literature defines social commerce as e-commerce that is mediated by social media (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Another definition of social commerce comes from Yadav, Valck, Henning-Thurau, Hoffman, and Spann (2013, p. 312) who define social commerce as *"exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange."* Both definitions clearly highlight

the relation to social media. Other authors highlight the social influence that comes from social media in stating that social media communities are used by e-commerce companies to use social influence in shaping the interaction among consumers (Kim & Srivastava, 2007).

Further, Huang and Benyoucef (2013, p. 247) define *"social commerce as a an Internet-based commercial application, leveraging social media and Web 2.0 technologies which support social interaction and user generated content in order to assist consumers in their decision making and acquisition of products and services within online marketplaces and communities."*

Even though different definitions of social commerce exists in literature because of its increasing relevance, all definitions highlight the social aspect of social commerce, which also again highlights the difference of social commerce and e-ecommerce again. This is further pointed out by Wang and Zhang (2012) as e-commerce has a primary focus on shopping and sales, whereas this focus is secondary in social commerce as the center of social commerce are networking, collaborations and information sharing among consumers. Therefore, even though marketing efforts should end up in sales most of the time, it is clear that in order to make social media pages work as social commerce platforms, it is not only sales that matter.

Social commerce can be further grouped into (1) social media platforms that allow for social commerce features like transactions and advertisements and (2) e-commerce websites that allow for social sharing and interaction among users (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). The former are social media platforms like Instagram or Facebook that have already implemented features that allow users to share their opinions, recommend products and finally also shop within the platforms via shoppable tags or an integrated Shop within the platform. The latter describes e-commerce websites of shops that have integrated their social media activities into the platform as for example opportunities of shopping what others bought or offer options for leaving an opinion about the product directly on the product page, for example at Amazon.

3.3.2. Social Media as Social Commerce platforms

Users increasingly use social commerce platforms to share experiences with products and services with peers. Consumers are increasingly active participants and generate their own content instead of only using content provided by the companies. This development drives value for both, businesses and consumers (Hajli, 2015). Basically, social commerce constructs or social commerce platforms mean the same. According to Hajli (2015, p. 184) social commerce constructs *"are social platforms which have emerged from Web 2.0 and empowered consumers to generate content and share their experiences."* Social commerce constructs are grouped into ratings, reviews, forums, communities and recommendation and

thereby facilitate communication and interaction among consumers (Hajli & Sims, 2015) which refers back to the importance of user-generated content.

Consumers are increasingly using social media to evaluate products, seek inspiration from others and get influenced by others. Whereas social media was quite separate from a company's e-commerce for quite a long time, social media platforms now catch up by integrating social media more and more into the e-commerce journey. For example, by integrating direct purchase options for customers like "buy now"-buttons. Lindsey-Mullkin and Borin (2017) even argue that social media communication models need to be changed due to the migration of social commerce. This underlines that social media cannot be seen as a separate topic, but offers huge opportunities for generating sales in the field of social media.

Companies react to these opportunities and step-by-step merge social media and e-commerce, which leads to social commerce on social media platforms. The social network Facebook is one of the first movers regarding social commerce and even received its own name regarding social commerce named Facebook commerce, in which companies can include their shop directly into their Facebook brand page. Other social media platforms now catch up by also adding different commerce features. The most recent introduction have been the shoppable tags on photos offered by Instagram, which have been introduced for everyone in 2018 (Instagram, 2018). By using these shoppable tags, users are directly linked to the product of the related shop.

The development of social media as social commerce platforms is underlined by current expert opinions who see this trend emerging in the next years (Koss, 2018).

Even though social commerce can take place on many different platforms, this paper will highlight the social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest and its corresponding social commerce features.

3.3.3. Reasons for users to use and adapt social commerce

While critical success factors in utilizing the visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms are limited in current research, different papers have investigated factors that influence community participation, adoption by users and loyalty, which are also relevant for implementing social media as social commerce platforms.

Therefore, this section will briefly give an overview about this body of research.

For example, Yilmaz and Enginkaya (2015) have studied what motivates consumers to follow brands on social media. They have found out five motives that are labelled as (1) brand affiliation, (2) conversation, (3) opportunity seeking, (4)

entertainment and (5) investigation. However, it is important to point out that not all followers of a brand community need to be real brand enthusiasts. Some people would have other reasons for joining such a community like getting special offers or following promotional events on the page. Also, consumers perception of the brand relationship is positively influenced by experiential and functional benefits on a brand's social network site (Park & Kim, 2013).

The same has also been investigated when it comes to social commerce as several researchers have discussed factors that facilitate social commerce. In this context, it is useful to draw upon the uses and gratification theory, which states that individuals will decide for media that fulfils their needs and therefore lead to gratification. Gratification users receive by using a certain medium can therefore be seen as a good predictor for media use and recurring media use (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Therefore, the following will shed a light on reasons for users to use social commerce.

In a study of Lal (2017) information support has been found as one of the strongest aspects in driving an individual's intention to use social commerce. The author thereby describes information support as recommendations, advice and experiences provided by other users. Users are increasingly relying on the opinion of others, wherefore they seek for recommendations and advice from others in social networks.

This again also underlines the importance of user-generated content. Users are more and more engaging among each other and firms via social media. Power turns from sellers to buyers (Hajli & Sims, 2015), which makes user-generated content even more relevant and important to firms. Content created by users increases trust and often offers recommendation and advice for fellow users. Users can have different reasons and motivation for creating content that includes brand products. The opportunity of getting featured on a brand's Instagram page for instance is considered as a strong motivator for creating highly relevant user-generated content. Often early adopters of a products fill channels like Instagram or Pinterest with user-generated content. Therefore, companies can use user-generated content and fill their own channels, which makes them appeal more authentic. Moreover, out of user-generated content and its reactions by other users, companies can develop formulas for success (Ansari & Müller, 2017).

It is increasingly important to firms to also use user-generated content in their social media platforms as due to the increasing oversaturation of content on social media platforms and the Internet in general, good content marketing becomes relevant as never before. Having a recognizable strategy is critical for every company that wants to succeed on social media. Especially for new companies, it is important to stand out and be unique (Hanna et al., 2011). Content marketing has also grown to a separate topic in the field of online and social media marketing,

which further underlines its need. The same also holds true for social commerce as for social commerce to function, companies need unique content as well.

Using user-generated content also enhances trust of the users, which is essential. Trust has been identified as a very important aspect in shaping consumers intention as well (Lal, 2017; Lin et al., 2017). Thereby, social commerce constructs have a positive impact on consumers trust in new services as well as products and also generate social word of mouth around consumers and potential customers. As trust has been identified as an important driver in social commerce, also social influencing and especially Influencer Marketing play an important role.

Further, according to Liang, Ho, Li, and Turban (2011) support and relationship quality are responsible for a user's intention to also use social commerce in the future.

Moreover, user experience and ease of use in general have been identified to be important contributors for users to accept social commerce and enjoy it (Gatautis & Medziausiene, 2014; Lal, 2017). Therefore, companies have to keep an eye on their user experience regarding social commerce as well.

3.4. The case of Instagram

Launched in 2010, Instagram has grown to one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide with more than 800 Million active users (Instagram, 2018a). The user base is immense as out of the total number, 500 users are active on a daily basis and 300 million are using Instagram stories daily. Moreover, it is still growing – especially in Germany (Neumann, 2018). In 2012, Facebook bought Instagram for 1 billion US-Dollar. Instagram describes itself as a place, where companies that want to express themselves, can encourage people for visible actions (Instagram, 2018b).

Additionally, Instagram users have huge brand community engagement and commitment (Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017) and 60% of all Instagram users state that they get to know new products from Instagram (Instagram, 2018b). Due to its reach, target groups and outstanding opportunities, Instagram grows in importance for companies and its influence is far from being neglected (Neumann, 2018). Further, Instagram constantly introduces new features like Instagram Stories and Live-Videos, which make the medium even more unique for users. Through Instagram stories and Live-Videos users have the possibility to get completely different insights of people behind an account or other behind-the-scenes features. Further, it can be seen as a great tool for storytelling (Neumann, 2018).

Whilst in their beginning stages, Instagram has focused on people instead of businesses. They opened their platform officially for businesses when introducing opportunities for advertising and official business profiles. Even though Instagram is

not the first-mover platform regarding social commerce, it has also introduced social-commerce options into their business recently (Lenz, 2017). The opportunity to include shoppable tags is available since March 2018, which highlights the importance for business even more. Further, Instagram continuously improves the opportunities for businesses to link to landing pages and shops out of the app. For example, through "swipe up" and shopping opportunities (Neumann, 2018). However, in order for this opportunities to work well, it also needs to be pointed out that branding is relevant, because brand followers have much more needs than just buying (Neumann, 2018).

What is further unique about Instagram is its development into an Influencer Marketing platform as one could state that influencer marketing is somehow accepted and learned by its users (Neumann, 2018). Moreover, its engagement rates are still strong in comparison to other networks, which still leaves room for businesses to grow organically (Neumann, 2018).
Further, both facts show that Instagram is not just working as a social commerce platform after introducing shoppable tags, but was already far ahead when it comes to engagement, influencers and recommendations for users.

Additionally, many success stories from brands prove that Instagram has also been key for their success story. For example, the German brands Kapten & Son, Odernichtoderdoch as well as Just Spices are popular for their growth through social media marketing on Instagram (Brecht, 2017). This proves that Instagram is an essential platform for making use of social commerce.

3.4.1. Social Commerce Features of Instagram

Even though Instagram was to a certain extent behind Facebook regarding its social commerce features, it now continuously introduces new feature offering different social commerce features besides having the opportunities for reviews, recommendations through users or influencers in place.
Generally speaking, Instagram offers three different methods, which all include opportunities for social shopping, namely (1) postings of photos or videos in the Instagram feed entailing shoppable tags, (2) Instagram Stories and Highlight-Stories and (3) Instagram Ads. Continuously Instagram Stories become more and more relevant (Neumann, 2018).

Shoppable posts
Shoppable posts are postings that can be tagged with products which directly link to the shop of the company. The integration of such shoppable tags enormously reduces the decision and conversion time (Instagram, 2018b). With shoppable tags the product page in only one click away and makes it easier for customers to find and shop products. A company has different opportunities regarding shopping formats meaning that they can either only use one picture or more than one in a

carousel format to tag products (Instagram, 2018b). Figure 2 displays an example of a shoppable post.
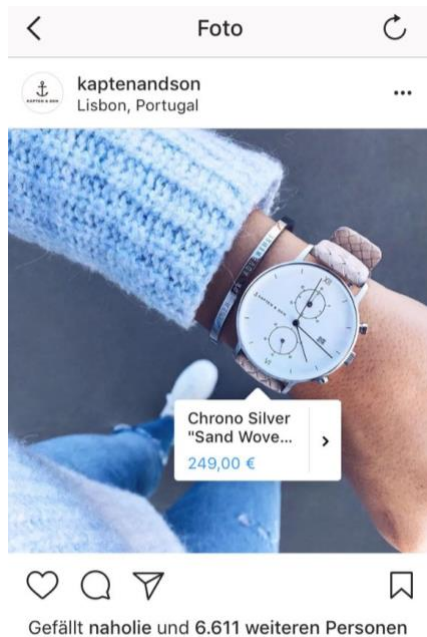
Figure 2: Example of a Shoppable Post of Instagram

Instagram Shop within the brand profile

Instagram offers the opportunity of an integrated shop within the brand Instagram profile. Within this shop users can see all Instagram pictures that are tagged with shoppable products. Therefore, next to simply linking relevant postings with shoppable products, the user also has the opportunity to only see postings with shoppable products on it. Figure 3 displays an example of an Instagram Shop (Instagram, 2018b).
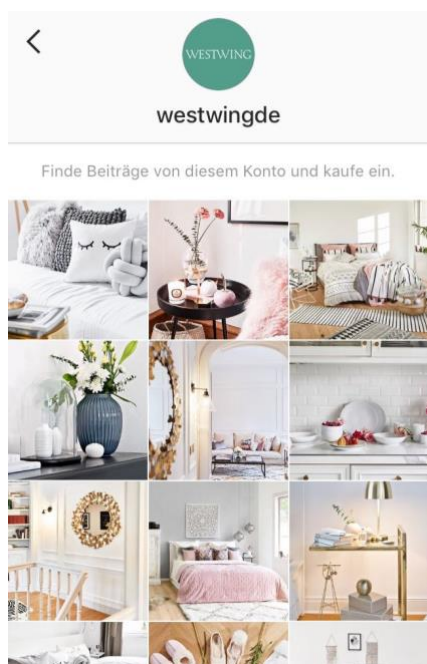
Figure 3: Example of an Instagram Shop

Links in Instagram Stories

Before introducing shoppable tags, the former only possible option to directly link to a company's shop, next to the link offered in the biography of the profile, has been offered through Instagram Stories. Now, users also have the option to "Swipe up" while watching stories and are linked to a certain landing page. However, this, until now, only works in profiles having more than 10.000 followers.

Ads in the Instagram Feed

Instagram offers two types of Ads, of which one are Ads that appear in the Instagram feed of users. Among those ads, Instagram offers the following three types: (1) Photo Ads, (2) Video Ads and (3) Carousel ads (Instagram, 2018b).

Ads in Instagram Stories

Next to Ads in the Instagram Feed, companies have the possibility to use Ads in Instagram Stories. Relevance of Ads in Instagram Stories continuously increases as more and more people are using Instagram Stories (Instagram, 2018a).

Companies can select ads and corresponding content based on their goals, which basically can be (1) brand awareness, (2) purchase considerations and (3) conversions (Instagram, 2018b).

3.4.2. Success Factors for Social Commerce on Instagram as defined by literature

The following section will shed a light on the success factors in using Instagram as a social commerce platform as mentioned by literature. Sources for these success factors have mainly been practical literature aiming at providing advice for companies directly.

Success Factors	Evidence
Content	(Saad & Rosenberg, 2018) (Neumann, 2018) (Preuss, 2016) (Lindsey-Mullkin & Borin, 2017)
Consistency	(Saad & Rosenberg, 2018) (Neumann, 2018; Preuss, 2016)
Collaborations and Influencer Marketing	(Saad & Rosenberg, 2018) (Neumann, 2018) (Lindsey-Mullkin & Borin, 2017)
Frequency	(Neumann, 2018) (Lindsey-Mullkin & Borin, 2017)
Approachable communication	(Neumann, 2018)
Watching out for current Trends	(Neumann, 2018)
Hashtags	(Preuss, 2016) (Neumann, 2018)

| Engagement | (Preuss, 2016) (Lindsey-Mullkin & Borin, 2017) |
| Strategy | (Saad & Rosenberg, 2018) (Neumann, 2018) (Lindsey-Mullkin & Borin, 2017) |

Table 2: Success Factors of Instagram as provided by literature

The factors mentioned by the different sources are described in detail in the section below.

Content

According to Saad and Rosenberg (2018) having a content concept and thereby create inspiring content while delivering the brand message and story is essential. The authors thereby add "We've learned that people appreciate the authenticity of an artful approach versus a direct advertisement. We've found that this type of content is most successful." It is necessary to create content that fits to both, Instagram and the brand itself. Thereby, the brand should further try to have a unique imagery (Neumann, 2018). However, companies should not only make sure that their content is very inspiring, but should also deliver fitting texts (Preuss, 2016)

Consistency

Consistency of the brand presence and its content should definitely be in place in order to make the account and brand recognizable (Neumann, 2018; Saad & Rosenberg, 2018). Thereby, consistency is to a certain extent related to high quality content as a consistent Instagram Feed and a consistent look and feel of the brand in total is highly relevant.

Collaborations and Influencer Marketing

Collaborations and Influencer Marketing have also been developed to success factors on Instagram. Instagram is to a certain extent the Influencer Marketing platform itself as Influencer marketing is to a certain extent accepted and learned by users and kind of normal to see (Neumann, 2018).

Frequency

Posting frequently while only positing high quality content is essential. Users expect continuous postings from nearly every profile they are following on Instagram. Further, having a frequent active profile is also highly relevant for Instagram's algorithm (Neumann, 2018).

Engagement

Engagement is also seen as a very important factor by literature (Lindsey-Mullkin & Borin, 2017; Preuss, 2016). Companies therefore need to engage with others as well as strive for engagement on their own account. Companies therefore need to be proactive and also leave likes and comments on profiles of other users, especially those who would probably be brand enthusiasts (Preuss, 2016).

Approachable communication

Moreover, having an approachable communication to customers is essential as well. Customers are therefore more open to interact with the company and each other if they are addressed as if they would be talking to friends and really feel taken cared of (Neumann, 2018).

Trend Analysis

Further, especially with fast-changing social media trends, it is always useful and highly recommend to keep an eye on current trends and adapt these trends to the company's social media profiles (Neumann, 2018).

Hashtags

Companies should carefully select the hashtags they want to use and further, if possible, also design an own company hashtag or specific campaign hashtags. Hashtags therefore have high potential if they are utilized in the right way (Neumann, 2018; Preuss, 2016).

Having a brand strategy in place

According to Saad and Rosenberg (2018) the most important thing is to have a clear strategy in place before a company starts on Instagram. Thereby it is essential to fix the brand messages, positioning, objectives and target audience as well as goals.

3.4.3. Influencer Marketing

Due to the fact that Influencer Marketing is extremely relevant, the following paragraph will dig a bit deeper into the topic.

Social influencing increasingly gains importance and can also be considered as an important driver of social commerce on Instagram (Wenzel, 2016). Influencer Marketing is seen as one of the hottest topics in today's social media marketing and has gained a lot of attention during the last few years as around 20% of the companies used Influencer marketing as a marketing tool in 2016 (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018). However, this number is continuously increasing (Neumann, 2018). Further, user-generated content from Influencers has on average a 4.5% higher conversion rate in comparison to content produced brands (Neumann, 2018).

Customers have more trust in word-of-mouth in relation to traditional media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and Influencer Marketing plays a huge role in word-of-mouth marketing as the majority of consumers hold the opinion that information provided in sponsored contributions is completely true and not influenced by the company, which in turn underlines its importance for social commerce. Especially millennials and generation Z are increasingly engaging with Influencer Marketing (Schaefer, 2017). However, when talking about social influencing it is not only

influencer marketing related to the biggest influencers in terms of followers, but also among normal consumers who might influence others by word-of-mouth (Koss, 2018).

Nirschl and Steinberg (2018) come up with success factors of Influencer marketing, which are (1) Reach, (2) Relevance, (3) Reputation, (4) Feedback, (5) Goal definition and (6) target group (Fig. 6). Concerning reach companies can select between reaching the mass or exact niches through small influencers. Relevance means both, fit between brand and influencer and fit between target group and community. Reputation describes the authenticity of the influencer. Further, it is essential to check the response and feedback of the influencer's activities. Clear goal and target group definitions are further essential parts of influencer marketing as well (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018).

There are different possible tactics existing related to influencer marketing, which are named (1) Ongoing ambassadorships, (2) Product reviews, (3) Brand mentions, (4) Event coverage, (5) Sponsored content and (6) Affiliate links. According to statistics about the most effective influence marketing tactics in the U.S. 2016 ongoing brand ambassadorships and product reviews are most effective (Statista, 2017).

Influencer marketing does not perform on every platform. The most important social media platforms are Instagram, which is kind of known as El Dorado for Influencer Marketing (Neumann, 2018), with 78% followed by blogs with only 16%. However, Wilson (2018) argues that *"we're moving toward smaller spheres of influence where customer advocates, micro-influencers and engaged employees matter more than ever."* (Wilson, 2018) Moreover, valuable, high quality content becomes even more important due to oversaturation (Norcross, 2018).

Therefore, among user-generated content, Influencer Marketing plays an important role for todays' social media marketing and is thus assumed to also have a high impact for social commerce.

3.5. The case of Pinterest

With more than 200 Million users, of which 50% users are internationals from outside the US, and its specific focus on inspiration Pinterest is considered as a very relevant platform as well. According to Pinterest, users use Pinterest because they search for new ideas to discover, memorise and test (Pinterest, 2018). Users use Pinterest because they have concrete problems and are searching for ideas and inspiration. This is also the basic idea of Pinterest – to let users collect ideas. However, Pinterest is not a social network – as continuously claimed by the founders of the platform (Hermann, 2016).

Pinterest is one of the platforms where one could say that organic reach is still possible. It has high click-out rates and users with purchase intentions in mind

leading to huge success of social commerce in this case. Therefore, Pinterest is a huge traffic source for companies. The half-time period of pins counts at least 3,5 months, which is quite much in comparison to other platforms where this periods is mostly just minutes (Hermann, 2016). Further, pins are usually repined 11x on average.

Pinterest belongs to the social media platforms that always had the commerce aspect in mind, but only slowly manages to roll out its whole social commerce potential – at least in Germany. However, experts still predict the continuous growth of Pinterest and state that it will also develop to an own search platform (Koss, 2018). Therefore, Pinterest will be far more than an inspirational platform.
In the U.S. Pinterest is way more popular and people are already able to buy in Pinterest with buyable pins, which works similarly to Instagram and Pinterest.
However, it is specifically useful on Pinterest as users of Pinterest have specific intentions, also buying intentions, in mind. According to Pinterest 96% of users are there to discover, while 93% of pinners use Pinterest in relation to a buying decision. 87% further state that they have already bought something which they discovered on Pinterest (Hermann, 2016). Therefore, special about Pinterest is its unique audience, where most of the users have the goal of looking for ideas and inspiration. According to Pinterest, users that search on Pinterest, already have buying in mind and are therefore especially open for product placements (Amand, 2016).

Basically, nearly all topics can be found on Pinterest, but food, beauty, fashion, DIY, home décor, travel and parenting are the most important categories that work well on Pinterest. Thereby, also most of the users are female, even though the proportion of male users is increasing (Hermann, 2016).
Moreover, Pinterest has different metrics, i.e. KPIs, when compared to other platforms. For example, what is most important on Pinterest are the number of Re-Pins, whereas the number of followers plays a secondary role (Hermann, 2016).

3.5.1. Social Commerce Features on Pinterest

Shop the look pins
Shop the look pins are to a certain extent similar to shoppable posts on Instagram as users can directly see which products are implemented in their inspirational postings and are then directly transferred to the shop (Pinterest, 2018). However, one can not directly buy in the app, which makes it different from Instagram. Figure 4 displays an example of a shop the look pin.
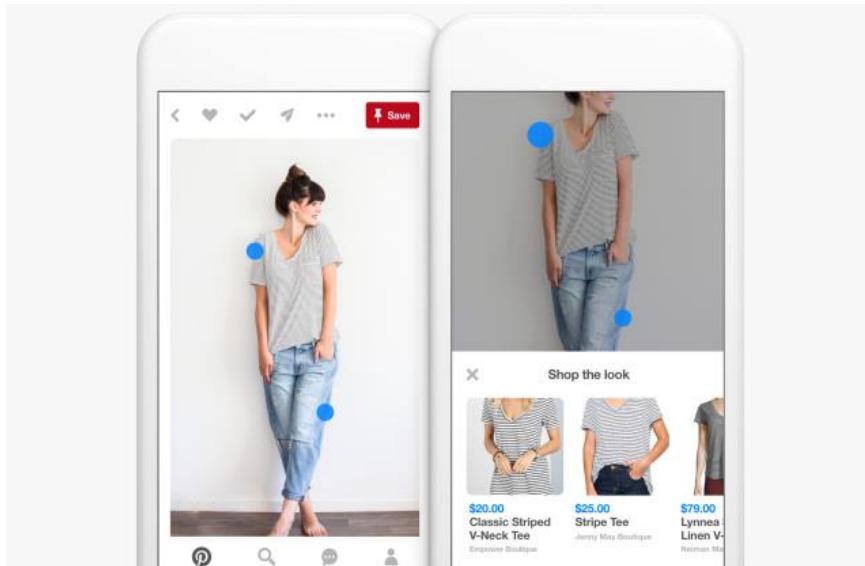
Figure 4: Example of a Shop the look Pin

Rich pins

Rich pins offer additional information that is directly visible on the corresponding Pin. Thereby companies can implement product rich pins, which show prices in real-time, availability of the product and the website of the company, where users can buy the offered product shown on the rich pin (Pinterest, 2018). For instance, this feature is often used by food bloggers, who directly state the needed ingredients via rich pins.
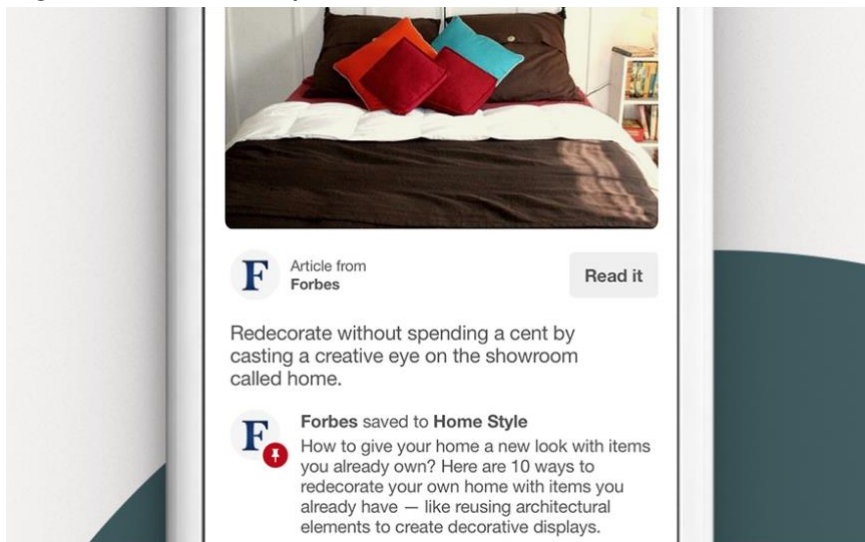
Figure 5: Example of a Rich Pin

Remember Button

The remember button offered by Pinterest builds the bridge between a company's website and a user's pins as users can directly pin products they like from the shop where they have seen the product or picture. In turn, every time a user uses the remember button on a company's website, more content is transferred to Pinterest meaning that more and more users see the content (Pinterest, 2018).

3.5.2. Success Factors of Pinterest as a Social Commerce Platform

As done also in the section above about Instagram, this section will shed a light on what is known about success factors of Pinterest regarding social commerce.

Success Factors	Evidence
Niche and Target audience	(Preuss, 2018)
Search engine optimization	(Hermann, 2016) (Preuss, 2018)
Structured Profile	(Preuss, 2018) (Hermann, 2016)
Content	(Hermann, 2016) (Preuss, 2018)
Optimization	(Preuss, 2018) (Hermann, 2016)
Pinterest Integration on Website	(Hermann, 2016)
Frequency	(Hermann, 2016)
Optimize Pin formats	(Hermann, 2016)

Table 3: Success Factors of Pinterest as provided by literature

Definition of Niche and Target audience
It is essential to define the target group and plan content specifically for the predefined group. Therefore, without defining a concrete target group, a strategy on Pinterest can not work out, as a whole Pinterest profile needs to be designed according to such a group – even though this is basically the case for all social media activities (Preuss, 2018).

Search engine optimisation for Pinterest
It is important to understand that Pinterest does not function as a usual social media platform, but that it is rather a visual search engine medium. Companies therefore need to search for relevant keywords on both google and Pinterest and optimise the Pinterest content according to these keywords. Thereby, it is also essential that the website content is optimised as well as the keywords in the picture titles if rich pins are implemented.

It is definitely worth to spend time in optimising the content as the traffic does not decline, but rather stays constant due to its nature as a search platform instead of another social media platform, in which only the newest content is most relevant (Preuss, 2018). This is due to the fact that pins have a huge half-time period when compared to other social media platforms.

Build up a structured Pinterest Profile that fits to your niche and target group
The Pinterest profile needs to fit the niche and target group. It is thereby recommended to use 15-30 boards that include relevant topic and may also differentiate between big topics and niche topics (Preuss, 2018).

The Pinterest profile then needs to be optimised with relevant keywords. The profile can only be found when profile, boards and pins are optimised. Relevant keywords are therefore important for pins in itself, but also for board names

(Preuss, 2018). Hereby, it is essential to remember that the company should pin for their preferred customers and not for the company itself.

Frequency: Create Pinterest Reach
The clue in generating reach on Pinterest is indeed not to simply post your own content, but to also pin pins from others. Through pinning from others, companies can generate higher reach. Preuss (2018) thereby suggests to pin 90% pins from strangers and 10% for oneself. By pinning content from others reach is growing and rankings are improved because of the fact that Pinterest values activity and will therefore also value back with good rankings. It is essential that Pinterest boards need to be filled frequently. Further, what also works well for Pinterest are seasonal pins, e.g. with Christmas or Easter topics, as many users utilize Pinterest as a planning tool (Preuss, 2018).

High Quality Content
As the goal is to create viral pins it is essential to analyze current content, what works and what does not work, what are current trending topics and what the competition is doing. It makes therefore sense to create content that works on Pinterest and implement and adapt it with the company style. However, it always needs to be tested what works out and what does not (Preuss, 2018).

One should also use the opportunity to upload different pictures and graphics for the same content and see what works best. According to Preuss (2018) in doing so, the chance to create a viral pin is also definitely growing. Moreover, graphics are working quite well for Pinterest, because they are able to incorporate more content, which creates a higher value for the users. Further, Pins should also be vertical (Preuss, 2018).

Optimize according to your analytics
It is essential to have a look on one's analytics in order to optimise one's content continuously. Check which pins have the highest click-out rates and which topics work best. With such insights, one's own content can be optimized more and more (Preuss, 2018).

Pinterest Integration into Website
Additionally, companies should make use of the possibility to integrate Pinterest into the own website or shop via Pinterest buttons, with whom users can directly pin from a company's website.

3.6. Summary of the Theory Chapter

The theory chapter has provided an overview about the relevant topics of this study while shedding light on the topic of social media and social commerce as well as possible critical success factors in relation to each of the platform of interest namely Instagram and Pinterest. Thereby, it predefines the critical success factors

as named by literature, which will afterwards be combined with insights from the interview to arrive at a final selection of CSFs.

Moreover, this chapter has answered the first two research questions, namely "What is social commerce?" and *"What are visual social media platforms and what are the most important ones?"*.

4. Results

In this chapter, the results of the semi-structured interviews will be presented and an overview of the critical success factors as identified by the interviews will be provided.

4.1. Potential for Social Commerce: Instagram vs. Pinterest

Firstly, to get a broad understanding about the interviewees opinion about the two platforms in focus, it has been investigated for which platforms, Instagram or Pinterest, more potential is seen.

Most of the interviewees hold the opinion that Instagram has the highest potential for working as social commerce platform, at least in Germany. The fact that Instagram has already integrated several social commerce functions, which offers the opportunity for the users to directly buy within the app, has been the most frequently mentioned one. Further, Instagram has way more users in comparison to Pinterest, at least in Germany. In addition, the connection to Facebook and the possibility to use Facebook data for placing Instagram ads makes Instagram very attractive as a platform itself. Moreover, one interviewee has mentioned that Instagram Stories make it possible to get a stronger connection to your customers as a brand.

However, all interviewees admit that Pinterest also has its advantages as well, which shows that they would not directly stick to one or the other. One interviewee, who basically would prefer Instagram over Pinterest has also stated that Pinterest is definitely perfectly suited for social commerce as the purpose of pins has always been to link to a website.

However, it has also been admitted that it depends on the company and product context. For example, some products are more suitable for Pinterest or Instagram than others – which is basically the case for each and every social media platform.

One interviewee stated that she would not prefer one over the other as it is always dependent on the product and company context. She said that if one has a product that perfectly suits the Instagram context and community, one can easily sell it via Instagram. Further, also the target group needs to fit Instagram in this case, wherefore one always need to think about the target group and platform fit first before implementing a platform. However, Pinterest has huge advantages in the search engine optimization area (SEO) which clearly differentiates it from

Instagram as a social media platform. One can easily grow on Pinterest through optimizing postings with strong keywords and generating reach. Therefore, Pinterest can not be seen as a typical social media platform, like known from Facebook and Instagram, but need to be viewed slightly different.

Further, one interviewee has also clearly stated that both platforms, Instagram and Pinterest are preferred over Facebook, since it is nearly impossible to still grow organically on Facebook. Nowadays, Facebook only makes sense in terms of advertising possibilities.

Therefore, Instagram and Pinterest both play an important role and have its advantages. However, Instagram is definitely seen as the bigger one in Germany because of its number of users and social commerce opportunities, while the possibilities of Pinterest can not be neglected.

4.2. Special Characteristics of Instagram and Pinterest

In the course of elaborating on the potential of the two platforms in functioning as a social commerce platform, it has also been investigated which features are particularly unique and representative for each platform.

4.2.1. Special Characteristics of Instagram

The popularity of Instagram and the huge commitment of users is mentioned by three interviewees. Especially the Instagram Stories function, through which background and proximity can be conveyed, is extremely unique for Instagram. One interviewee further stated "I think that currently Instagram stories is what differentiates Instagram, because users are getting a completely different insight of personality and authenticity. For sure, it is also the artistic nature and perfect pictures what makes up Instagram, but Stories and the opportunity of disappearing content make it up as well."

Further, two interviewees have mentioned that interactions, and especially the huge interaction rate, is special about that platform since "the interaction is giant in comparison to other platforms."
Another interviewee has also stated that the possibility to be discovered on Instagram is still quite strong.

4.2.2. Special Characteristics of Pinterest

What all interviewees have agreed on in relation to the particularity of Pinterest is that it should not be seen as a usual social media platform, but rather as a search engine. It does not depend on the number of followers or other metrics that are known from other social media platforms, but rather on having pins that are found by users.

Further, when using Pinterest, users are aim searching for specific ideas, which underlines that Pinterest users are more willing to buy products as they already have specific goals in mind. Offering high levels of Inspiration is therefore very important to Pinterest.

4.3. Success Factors for Social Commerce on Instagram

The following paragraph describes the success factors related to utilizing Instagram as a social commerce platform as mentioned by the interviewees. The eleven factors identified during the interviews are the following: *Authenticity, Community, Interactions, Influencer Marketing, High Quality Content, Consistency, Hashtags, Frequency, Knowledge about the Target Audience, Strategy, Right Ad Targeting, and Uniqueness.* Figure 1 provides an overview with corresponding evidence from the interviews.

Success Factors	Number	Evidence from the interviews
Authenticity	4	"Authenticity is getting more and more important, even though a lot of people are still very superficial." "Instagram Stories and Live Videos are providing room for more authenticity and thereby generate new possibilities."
Community	4	"Having a gorgeous community behind you will always make it possible to earn money with it." "Becoming part of the whole community without just willing to sell products is definitely important."
Interactions	4	"You have to interact as it is not enough to simply post something without doing anything else. You need to engage with the people."
Influencer Marketing	4	"I think that Influencer Marketing can definitely support the success of commerce as a brand on Instagram." "Collaborations with Influencers and Bloggers will help in growing an Instagram channel of a brand."
High quality content	4	"You need high quality content, otherwise it wouldn't work." "You definitely have to keep an eye on the design – both in your feed and stories."

Consistency	3	"Having a consistent imagery and Instagram Feed is definitely important"
Hashtags	3	"One should definitely know how to work with hashtags and thereby use relevant ones and maybe also create an own brand hashtag."
Frequency	2	"The most important aspect is the frequency. If a company is just posting now and then, the brand account cannot grow."
Knowledge about the Target Audience	2	"You exactly need to know who your target group is and deliver content that is especially suitable for them."
Strategy	2	"As a basis you should always have a strategy at hand."
Right Ad Targeting	2	"Due to the fact that advertising opportunities are stronger on Instagram in comparison to Pinterest, one should definitely know how to utilize them effectively."
Uniqueness	1	"A brand should have a unique standing, which differentiates it from others."

Table 4: Critical Success Factors of Instagram as provided by the interviews

Authenticity

Authenticity is a very important factor shown by the fact that it has been mentioned by four interviewees as one of the most important aspects for using Instagram as a social commerce platform. Authenticity is growing because of the increase in the usage of Instagram Stories and Live Sessions. Through Instagram Stories the brand has a completely different opportunity to build an authentic brand image to the outside world next to having a perfectly designed Instagram Feed. Live videos are muss less popular in comparison to Instagram stories, but also seen as a growing medium by every interviewee's view.

Further, authenticity strongly relates to the brand image and therefore is quite essential for generating sales in the long-term. The company therefore should focus on the brand itself without working too product focused.

Moreover, working with reposts is seen as a great way for improving authenticity. Having an authentic account in place is also important when it comes to Influencer Marketing. Companies that would like to stay authentic also need to work with Influencers having an authentic account in place as well. Therefore, this paper will shed a light on the Influencer Marketing topic as well as later in this section.

Community

Community is regarded as key when companies want to succeed on Instagram. When having a great community behind the brand the company will always be able

to generate sales as the community will be paying customers. In this context one interviewee has stated that the number of followers is not what makes a good community, but that followers need to convert to raving fans, who really celebrate the idea since those are the people that will also buy the products. She has stated that "it doesn't matter how many people follow you, rather it is essential that you have people willing to invest money in your brand." In order to build such a community one needs to be part of the Instagram community it itself – also as a company. Thereby, as already been mentioned in the paragraph above, it is essential to interact on the same level with one's followers.

Further, the company needs to interact with people who have the same interests as the company. Only the people who love what a brand does can also convert to raving fans. Even though building a community will take time, it is what counts and what pays off in the end.

Interaction

Somehow related to community, but still mentioned as a separate success factor, is Interaction. Companies need to strive for interactions and also need to interact with others themselves. Thereby, one interviewee has stated "People need to recognize that there are ordinary people behind a brand channel and the company. It is not enough to simply create postings, as it is much more work than just posting pictures." Further, even if one has many followers, they aren't useful if one does not have interactions and engagement on the profile and postings. Exchange with the community has therefore a huge impact on success.

Only by interacting with other users, one is able to build up a community.

However, as having high engagement rates on their brand pages is what companies are aiming for, it is essential to have high quality and inspiring content, which leads to the next success factor.

High Quality Content.
Having high quality content in place is definitely important and has been mentioned by six interviewees. In relation to high quality content it is also seen as essential to stick to the photo style and imagery of Instagram itself. However, it also makes sense to stick out to a certain extent and to be unique. Thereby, one interviewee also sees uniqueness as a separate success factor in this context.

Hand in hand with high quality content goes consistency within the imagery of the brand as users love to scroll through an inspiring, consistent Instagram feed.

However, high quality content is not only the content relating to pictures, but also the positing text, which may be forgotten by many brands.

Further, planning the content carefully is essential and Investing time in planning and creating good content will definitely pay off.

Influencer Marketing

Also, four interviewees state that Influencer Marketing is important for success on Instagram, which is also underlines by the fact that all interviewees see a relation

between Influencer Marketing and the success on social media regarding social commerce in general. A detailed description about the topic of Influencer Marketing will be found in the next section.

Hashtags
Further, utilizing hashtags in the right way is also seen as highly relevant by three interviewees. In their opinion it is essential to insert hashtags quite precisely. When the right hashtags are chosen, it is way easier to be detected and found by others. For example, only if stories are linked to hashtags, postings can be found on the explore tap. Additionally, if possible and reasonable it will always make sense to include the location as well as linked postings that will land in the geo explore area.

Consistency
Consistency has also been mentioned as a success factor by three interviewees. Therefore, it is essential that companies stick to their imagery and branding when interacting on Instagram in order to ensure building up a recognition value. Instagram is a visual platform and stands out for its perfect pictures. This is why most of the time low quality pictures simply do not preform.

Frequency
Moreover, frequency has been mentioned as an important factor by two interviewees. Next to having high quality content in place, it is also important to post frequently as users expect frequent postings. In that context one interviewee has stated "The most important aspect is frequency. If a company is just posting now and then, the brand account can not grow." Further, Instagram's algorithm also values frequent activity.

Strategy
Additionally, having a well through strategy in place is seen as relevant by two interviewees. One needs to know how to take the challenge of introducing Instagram as a platform seriously and plan ahead quite carefully. Therefore, companies need a detailed plan of what content should be used at what time and what goal the company wants to achieve.
The same proves for playing ads on Instagram since it only works out if carefully planned ahead. However, strategy is also mentioned as a success factor incidentally.

Knowledge About the Audience
Before starting an Instagram account or before starting to plan an Instagram Strategy companies should make sure about their target group and how to reach them. Knowing the audience and planning content that exactly fit to this audience is seen as essential by two interviewees. Even though this factor strongly relates to strategy itself, it is has still been mentioned as a separate factor.

Knowledge about Ad Targeting

Having a fitting ad strategy in place is seen as an important factor by two interviewees as well. "Due to the fact that advertising opportunities are stronger on Instagram in comparison to Pinterest, one should definitely know how to utilize them effectively."

4.3.1. Social Commerce Features of Instagram and Ads

As described in the theory section before, there are several social commerce features that Instagram as a social media platform has to offer. In this context, the interviewees have been asked which features they see as the ones that work best.

Social Commerce Features of Instagram: Instagram Shop, Shoppable Tags and Links

Due to the fact that the opportunity of direct shopping via Instagram is a very new feature, the interviewees have been quite cautious in stating which feature works out best. All of them have the opinion that every company needs to test continuously what works out best for their brand since some features might work well for others but would not work for someone else's brand.

Moreover, all interviewees further believe that companies might love the social commerce feature more than customers do because not all customers have the intention to shop every time. However, the features for sure make shopping a lot easier for customers as they can directly see prices of products for instance.

One interviewee has mentioned that for features that work, it is definitely essential that they do not become too promotional, otherwise users would be annoyed of such content. One interviewee therefore added that it is also Instagram's challenge to make sure that it does not develop to a second Facebook since Facebook has rather been destroyed by its huge amount of commerce and advertising. It is thereby essential that Instagram needs to change slowly and shall not overwhelm its users with such changes.

Instagram Ads as Social Commerce Feature

The same basically applies for Instagram Ads. All interviewees agree that Instagram Stories seem to be the best ad format right now but would not say that the other formats are not good at all. It always depends on the ad itself and further it has been agreed that the ad creativity and ad content is much more important than the ad placement.

Advantages of the Story Ads are that users pay full attention on the ad because it is shown on the whole display which is in contrast to the Instagram Feed itself where the user scrolls through quite fast. However, one interviewee also mentions that he would only prefer Story Ads when it comes to brand awareness. Because ads

rather have a performance goal, the other formats might work better. Therefore, the success of campaigns always depend on the campaign, the creativity and target group. Further, for ads to perform, it is extremely important that they provide a value for the users.

4.3.2. Influencer Marketing and Social Commerce

Due to the fact that Influencer Marketing is highly related to success on Instagram, this relatively new topic has been integrated into one of the sub-questions of this paper. The following paragraph will therefore deal with this topic.

All interviewees thereby are convinced that Influencer Marketing is closely related to successfully using Instagram as a social commerce platform. In order to investigate into the topic further, interviewees have been asked what companies should take care of when applying Influencer Marketing and what is necessary when selecting Influencers.

Table 5 thereby displays an overview of the factors that are most important here.

| Precise selection of the Influencers | "Companies should not be led and blinded by the number of followers alone, even though it is an important aspect."

"Companies definitely need to spend more time on the topic of Influencer Marketing itself, have a closer look at the Influencers and further also look behind the number of followers." |
|---|---|
| Fit of interest between influencer and target group of companies | "It is important that the followers of the Influencer have the same interests that the company has. It does not make sense to select an Influencer who is not relevant for the brand." |
| Reach | "Reach is important since this is also what you want to achieve, but if the budget is not that high it makes more sense to use the budget for micro-influencers. They are a lot more authentic. I would rather say that authenticity and the fact that the Influencer is able to convey the message in an authentic way is more important than having a high reach." |
| Community of the Influencer | "The community of the Influencer also plays a huge role. The Influencer thereby should have a huge fan base that really love suggestions given by the Influencer." |
| Content Quality | "Moreover, it is important that the Influencer understands how to create quality content, i.e. pictures because the content quality is highly relevant." |
| Long-Term Relationships | "Influencer relations are very important, because authenticity and credibility are increasing." |

Precise selection of the Influencer

In total four interviewees mention that it is important to deal with the topic of Influencer marketing in general, in order to understand the topic in detail and thereby precisely select the corresponding Influencers. Therefore, before starting and selecting Influencers, the company should know a lot about the backgrounds of Influencer marketing.

Fit of interest between Influencer and target group of companies

Further, next to selecting the Influencer quite precisely, it is essential to have a look on the Influencers followers as they need to have the same interests as the predefined target group of the company. If this is not the case a cooperation with that Influencer might not make much sense.

Reach

Even though reach is not the only aspect when selecting influencers, it is still relevant as the ultimate goal is to reach people and convert them into loyal customers.

Community

Moreover, next to having a community behind the Influencer that fits the target group, it is also essential that the followers of the Influencer are really raving fans that celebrate what the person is doing and are therefore very likely to adapt suggestions given by the Influencer.

Content quality

Furthermore, due to the fact that the Influencer is also responsible for creating content for the brand, it is essential to ensure a high quality of the produced content that fits to the Influencer and the brand equally.

4.4. Success Factors of Pinterest

The following paragraph describes the success factors in using Pinterest as a social commerce platform as mentioned by the interviewees. The seven identified success factors are: *Search Engine Optimization for Pinterest, Structured Pinterest Profile, Content, Frequency, Strategy, Understanding of Pinterest and Inspiration.* Table 6 shows an overview of these mentioned factors.

Success Factors Pinterest	Number	Evidence from the Interview
Search Engine Optimization for	5	"It is very important to understand that Pinterest is not a usual social media platform, but rather needs

Pinterest		to be treated as a search engine. I think, those who understand that Pinterest functions as a search engine already have the most important factor for success in place." "Next to having inspiring images, it is extremely important to have good texts with important keywords in place."
Structured Pinterest Profile	3	"You need a very well-structured profile with structured boards that inspire your target group."
Content	3	"Having great content in place is important, wherefore building up a great Pinterest page can be seen as a huge content marketing mission."
Frequency	3	"On Pinterest you need much more content in comparison to Instagram. Currently we are working with 6 postings per day plus repins on top." "It is very important to pin frequently. Most of the people say that it is a good rate to pin about 20% of own content and 80% of content from others."
Strategy	2	"A strategy for Pinterest is even more important than for Instagram, since a lot more content is needed." "Having a long-term strategy for Pinterest in place is important, because it only makes sense to build up a Pinterest page if one has long-term thinking in place."
Understanding of Pinterest	2	"The first thing is to understand that Pinterest needs to be treated as a search engine."
Inspiration	1	"Delivering Inspiration with great content is very important as people are on Pinterest looking for Inspiration and ideas."

Table 6: Critical Success Factors of Pinterest as provided by the interviews

Search engine optimization for Pinterest

As mentioned by all interviewees the most important factor for using Pinterest as social commerce platform is to understand that Pinterest does not function as a usual social media platform, but rather as a search engine medium. As one interviewee states "it is very important to understand that Pinterest is not a usual social media platform, but rather needs to be treated as a search engine. I think, those who understand that Pinterest functions as a search engine already have the most important factor for success in place."

It is thereby essential to use the right keywords by texting the different pins as "one will only be found if the pins are marked with the right keywords."

Structured Pinterest Profile

What also kind of belongs to a search engine optimized Pinterest profile is a well-structured Pinterest profile itself as mentioned by three interviewees. It is essential to cover different topics of interest within boards that are clustered in a right way. One interviewee states that "you need a very well-structured profile with structured boards that inspire your target group."

In that context, one can not generalize the number of boards, but they all need to be filled with relevant content and should fit the topics the brand covers and are interesting for the target group.

Content

Content, especially a lot of content, is seen as important by three interviewees. In contrast to Instagram, having success on Pinterest will need a lot more content and postings. Pictures and text also work different for Pinterest in comparison to Instagram. On Pinterest graphics and pictures with text are more important because pins are regarded as teasers, for blog posts for instance. However, one interviewee also has admitted that she thinks that graphics are quite important but she would not see graphics as a success factor itself because SEO and frequency is much more important to her.

For sure, the content still needs to be of high quality and especially needs to inspire the users.

Strategy

Having a strategy for Pinterest in place is definitely relevant as named by two interviewees – even though this is the case for every platform basically. One interviewee stated, "A strategy for Pinterest is even more important than for Instagram, since much more content is needed." Moreover, having a long-term strategy for Pinterest in place is important, because it only makes sense to build up a Pinterest page if one has long-term thinking in place."

Frequency

Frequency is very important as Pinterest is continuously evaluating a profile and it pins from activity. "We do 6 postings per day and even more on weekends. Additionally we do repins everyday, but without having a fixed number." Another interviewee has the opinion that 10 pins per day are useful. She further adds that it makes sense to post about 20% own content and repin about 80% per day. However, most of the companies think that this is way too much and not practicable at all, but it is essential for a working Pinterest profile.

Further, frequency is further essential because pins have a huge life-time value meaning that the possibility that you pin something and this directly goes viral does not happen at all. It takes time and patience for having a well-working Pinterest.

Understanding Pinterest

Understanding Pinterest and its specials it is also mentioned by two interviewees, even though this is mainly meant in relation to the functions of Pinterest as a search engine rather than a usual social media platform.

Inspiration

Delivering inspiration is considered as important by one interviewee. Thereby, creating a huge amount of Inspiration is very important, because that is why people are on Pinterest: They are searching for ideas and inspiration.

4.4.1. Social Commerce Features of Pinterest

Currently, social commerce features on Pinterest in Germany are a bit behind when compared to Instagram or Facebook. However, in the U.S. Pinterest is much more popular and has already introduced buyable pins as well as advertising opportunities for companies.

However, this does not mean that Pinterest may have less potential regarding social commerce in Germany. In contrast to that, Pinterest itself has been kind of made for social commerce as one interviewee mentioned "the phenomenon is that people on Pinterest are explicitly searching for ideas and inspiration and are highly willing to purchase." Therefore, all interviewees agree that buyable pins, if also introduced in Germany, would have very high potential which can also be justified by the fact that "shop- the-look pins" are working quite well and have been highly incorporated by users.

Further, even though it is not yet possible to make ads on Pinterest, all interviewees believe that Pinterest will also follow in introducing ads in the near future.

One interviewee has further added that she really likes the social commerce functions on Pinterest as they are not too commercial and intrusive. Currently, it is also still possible to grow organically on Pinterest since there are not too many companies that are active on Pinterest.

4.5. The critical success factors in the context of start-ups

Due to the fact that the thesis is written in cooperation with a case company, which is a start-up company in the home textiles industry, it has been investigated whether the interviewees have the opinion that the success factors may also be adaptable for start-ups or whether start-ups should take something else into account when designing their social commerce strategies for Instagram and Pinterest.

Thereby, all interviewees think that there does not exist any difference, due to the

fact that in the end every business or account on social media needs to convince with its work. However, it is always essential to be patient because it will take time to grow a community even though this means that it might take a bit longer for unknown brands to succeed. While popular brands already have brand communities, who might also follow those brands on social media, this is not the case for start-ups. Thereby, one interviewee has said that the company clearly needs to connect with people of the same interest and build a relationship with them.

Further, two interviewees state that start-ups can also highly benefit from Influencer Marketing, especially in their beginning.

Moreover, two interviewees even think that it may be a lot easier for start-ups to build a brand than for established businesses since they are more flexible in their daily business and most of the time do not follow specific rules and regulations that are within the company for years. Therefore, start-ups have more freedom in creating the content they want to. One interviewee believes that start-ups can profit from using all new ways of communicating with customers, like Instagram Stories for instance. By doing so, the whole start-up journey can be shown for customers in an authentic way. Showing such an authentic content makes users identifying themselves with the start-up team as well.

However, it still needs to be admitted that start-ups have restrictions concerning their budget and other resources.

5. Data Analysis

The following paragraph will bring together and analyse the findings from literature and interviews. This part will therefore be structured according to the empirical research sub-questions: (1) Critical Success Factors of Instagram, (2) The role of Influencer Marketing and (3) Critical Success Factors of Pinterest. Further, the sub-questions will help in answering the main research question in the end.

5.1. Critical Success Factors for Instagram

Starting with the critical success factors related to Instagram the results of the interviews implicate the following success factors: (1) Authenticity, (2) Community, (3) Interactions, (4) Influencer Marketing, (5) High Quality Content, (6) Consistency, (7) Hashtags (8) Frequency, (9) Target Audience, (10) Strategy and (11) Targeted Advertising and (12) Uniqueness. The factors are ordered from most important to least important in relation to the number of interviewees who mentioned the different factors.

The success factors as named by the interviewees are nearly in line with what has also been investigated during the literature review.

Literature also identifies (1) Interaction and Engagement, (2) High Quality Content, (3) Influencer Marketing, (4) Consistency, (5) Frequency, (8) Target audience, (9) Strategy and (10) Targeted Advertising. However, authenticity and community are not mentioned as separate success factors in literature, but are rather included indirectly by stating that authentic content is necessary and that high engagement is critical but high engagement rates will only be achieved if the brand has a thriving community behind its account. This relation is already an indication that success factors can not be viewed as separate, but need to be seen as interrelating aspects. Further, both factors – authenticity and community - are mentioned by four interviewees each, which still highlights its importance as separate factors.

In this case the interviewees might have seen a broader picture in comparison to what is defined in literature. Further the importance of authenticity has grown enormously due to an increasing amount of Influencers during the last few months. Consumers become more sceptical and therefore need to be convinced by authenticity. However, it is also important to add that having a community behind a brand can rather be seen as a goal that will be achieved when applying the other success factors, but a thriving community behind a brand account is essential for social commerce to work.

Moreover, literature adds approachable communication to customers (Neumann, 2018) as well as continuous trend analysis (Neumann, 2018) as separate success factors, which are not yet mentioned by the interviewees as separate ones. However, approachable communication has also been mentioned by interviewees in the context of Instagram Stories because Instagram Stories make it more possible for companies to have an approachable communication with users as companies can directly speak to their customers, introduce themselves and show some scenes of their daily business. Further, approachable communication has also been mentioned when stating that authenticity is important since through approachable communication also authenticity is generated.

What is also interesting to observe is that having a strategy in place is not mentioned by all interviewees, whereas it has still been mentioned in literature. This might be due to the fact that having a strategy defined beforehand is already seen as standard prerequisite by the interviewees and therefore not defined as a success factor itself.

By combing the factors mentioned in literature and by the interviewees one arrives at seven critical success factors related to Instagram, which are (1) High Quality and Authentic Content, (2) Interactions and Engagement, (3) Consistency, (4) Influencer Marketing, (5) Frequency, (6) Hashtags and last but not least also (5) Strategy. Table 1 thereby provides a graphical representation and explanation of the identified critical success factors in using the visual social media platform Instagram as a social commerce platform.

Critical Success Factors in using Instagram as Social Commerce Platform	Description
High Quality and Authentic Content	High quality content is essential to succeed on Instagram.
Interactions and Engagement	Companies need to be active and interact with users in order to receive engagement.
Consistency	Consistency related to the imagery and brand creatives is essential in order to be remembered easily. Moreover, especially a fitting and inspiring Instagram feed is critical.
Influencer Marketing	Instagram is "the" platform for Influencer Marketing and therefore indispensable.
Frequency	Further, posting frequently is important as well as both the community expect continuous content, but it is also essential for the Instagram algorithm.
Hashtags	Even though the potential of hashtags has to a certain extent been underestimated, it has still its potential – especially when it comes to stories.
Strategy	Having a strategy in place is important in order to define the basic goals.

Table 7: Critical Success Factors in using Instagram as social commerce platform

5.1.2. The role of Influencer Marketing on Instagram

Going on with the topic of Influencer Marketing in general, one needs to state that all seven interviewees have the opinion that there is a relation between the usage of Influencer Marketing and the success of social commerce especially on Instagram. This is not surprising due to the fact that the role of Influencer Marketing is continuously increasing (Neumann, 2018). However, it has also been admitted that Influencer Marketing only works when it is implemented in the right way. Therefore, the interviewees have also been asked about what they think is most important regarding Influencer Marketing, especially the selection of Influencers.

When comparing the success factors mentioned by the interviewees with those from literature it can be concluded that they are entailing nearly completely the same factors. Companies need to select their influencers precisely, check their relevance and reputation and therefore also the fit of interest between the influencer and the target group, which needs to fit with the goal definition of the company. Moreover, companies need to check the reach of the Influencer but still make sure that the Influencers followers are raving fans, who celebrate being part of the community.

The only two factors that have been added by the interviewees are (1) Content Quality and (2) Long-term Relationships. However, due to the fact that these factors are not mentioned in literature and are further not mentioned by many interviewees they are not seen as important factors regarding Influencer Marketing.

5.2. Critical Success Factors for Pinterest

Going on with the critical success factors of Pinterest it can be concluded that the interviewees have named the following factors: (1) Structured Pinterest Profile, (2) Search Engine Optimization for Pinterest, (3) Content, (4) Frequency, (5) Strategy, (6) Inspiration, (7) Understanding of Pinterest as a Platform (8) Optimisation of content.

These results are also partly in line with what is stated in literature. Literature also directly defines (1) Strategy, (2) Structured Pinterest Profile, (3) Search Engine Optimisation for Pinterest, (4) Content, (5) Frequency and (6) Optimisation of content.
Interestingly, even though mentioned in literature, having Pinterest integrated into the website via the "Pin it"-Buttons is not directly seen as a success factor for interviewees. Therefore, it is excluded as having it as a critical success factor but rather seen as an additional factor for increasing success. This makes sense sincethe integration is rather something to put on top as an extra factor that is kind of nice to have, but not completely relevant for success.

Further, literature also mentions the clarification of niche and target audience as a separate success factor. However, this has not explicitly been named by the interviewees, which may be because of fact that it falls rather into the strategy part, where it is assumed that while creating a strategy the target audience is defined as well. However, as already also mentioned in the Instagram section, strategy is not mentioned as the most important success factor by the interviewees because of the fact that it is seen as a prerequisite to have a strategy at hand. However, as strategy is mentioned by both, literature and interviewees, it is still included as a critical success factor as it might not be obvious for all companies to have a detailed strategy at hand before starting on Pinterest (or Instagram).

What is identified by both, literature and interviews, ends as critical success factors in using Pinterest as a social commerce platform as shown in Table 8, which are (1) Structured Pinterest Profile, (2) Search Engine Optimisation for Pinterest, (3) Content, (4) Frequency, (5) Optimization of Content and (6) Strategy.

Critical Success Factors in using Pinterest as Social Commerce Platform	Description
Structured Pinterest Profile	A structured Pinterest profile with combined boards needs to be there.
Search Engine Optimisation for Pinterest	Due to the fact that Pinterest cannot be seen as a usual social media platform, but rather as a visual search engine, search engine optimization for Pinterest is highly relevant.
Content (Inspiration)	High quality content is essential as well as users of Pinterest are searching for inspiration and ideas.
Frequency	It is essential to be active on Pinterest on a daily basis with both, own pins and Repins.
Optimization of content	Further, companies should use the full potential of Pinterest by optimising pictures and graphics.
Strategy	Having a strategy for Pinterest in place is essential as it is something that takes huge efforts.

Table 8: Critical Success Factors for using Pinterest as social commerce platform

5.3. Visual Social Media Platforms: Critical Success Factors in general

After defining the critical success factors for each platform separately the following paragraph will combine the factors of both platforms, Instagram and Pinterest, to arrive at critical success factors in using visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms in general. While investigating what has been mentioned for both platforms the following conclusions for visual social media in general can be drawn. Figure X provides an overview about these factors.

Having high quality content that is authentic, inspiring and unique is relevant for each and every visual social media platform for a successful utilization of social commerce. Thereby, companies need to put a lot of effort in content creation and content marketing to inspire its users. However, it is essential to optimise the content for each platform, because each platform has its own requirements and some content will be more useful for one platform than for the other.

Further, next to posting and creating own content, companies need to interact and engage with its community in order to be approachable for their customers. Nowadays, creating content postings alone is not enough to build a thriving community behind a brand, wherefore the company needs to show proactive actions. Even though types of interactions are different for each platform, it is always relevant to interact and engage regardless of the platform.

Moreover, it is critical to be active on a frequent basis, where being active on a daily basis is nearly expected on every platform. In addition, one platform might demand more content in comparison to another, which would be the case for Pinterest for instance. Furthermore, frequency is also important for the algorithm of the platforms, that highly values frequency of accounts.

Additionally, as each platform has its own options and rules, it is essential to optimise each social media profile for the specific social media platform. For example, Pinterest has quite specific image formats and each pin needs to be optimised regarding keywords etc., whereas Instagram needs to be optimized with respect to hashtags or location-based tags in order to increase its reach. Therefore, it is essential to understand each platform precisely.

Moreover, next to an optimisation of each social media profile, companies also need to know how to use ads on each platform in the right way, which is important because each platform has its own options.

Critical Success Factor
Content   **Interactions and Engagement**   **Frequency**   **Optimization of the Profile**   **Right Ad Targeting**   **Strategy**
The Role of Influencer Marketing
• Influencer Marketing has a huge impact on social commerce success   • Precise selection of Influencers is necessary in order to get the most out of it
Implications for start-ups
• Critical success factors are not only of enormous importance for established companies, but are also highly relevant for start-ups   • Even though start-ups have limited resources, they may profit from more flexibility and less rules and regulations

Table 9: Summary of Analysis Results

Additionally, having a predefined strategy in place is relevant for each and every social media platform, because it does not make sense to start off without having a good strategy in place. However, as already concluded in the separate paragraphs about Instagram and Pinterest, strategy is rather a success factor that relies on a

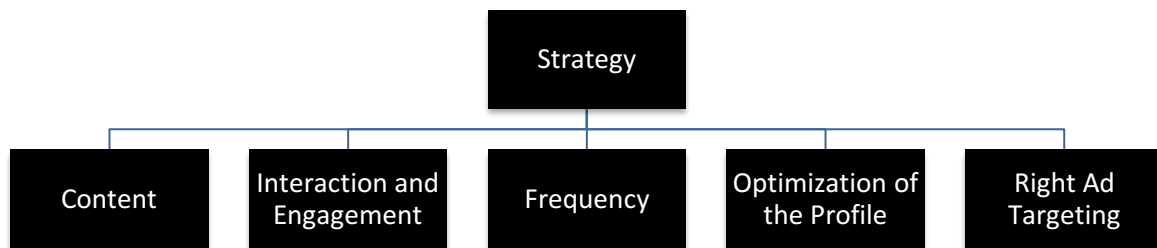higher level when compared with the other factors, which are all rather on operational level (see Figure 10).

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  │  Content  ││     and     ││ Frequency  ││   of the     ││ Targeting  │
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Table 10: Levels of Critical Success Factors

6. Conclusion and Discussion

The conducted analysis of the literature and expert interviews provide useful results for answering the research question and the corresponding sub-questions of this paper. This final chapter will therefore answer the research questions, contain a part discussing the result, provide theoretical and practical implications as well as limitations and implications for further research. Moreover, recommendations for the case company will also be discussed.

6.1. Answering the Research Questions

Research Question: What are critical success factors (CSF) for using the visual social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest as social commerce platforms?
In order to answer this question both platforms have been analysed separately since both have its own special features which make up each platform. By putting all insights together, it is possible to define the following success factors related to the visual social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest by using them as social commerce platforms. Based on the interviews that have been held with seven experts in the field of social media marketing, six critical success factors have been identified, namely *Content, Interaction and Engagement, Frequency, Optimization of the Profile, Right Ad Targeting and Strategy*. Thereby, strategy is seen as critical success factor based on a higher, strategic level, whereas the others are rather on an operational level. Before starting on social media it is always useful to create a specific strategy first before implementing it wisely. Having high quality as well as authentic content plays a huge role for visual social media platforms next to active interactions and engagement with the community. In this context, frequency is highly valued. Moreover, companies always need to optimize their profile and postings according to the platform. Moreover, because of a general decrease in organic reach, it is essential to have huge knowledge regarding ad targeting on the different platforms.
What are critical success factors (CSF) for using Instagram as social commerce platform?

Coming to Instagram it can be concluded that critical success factors are (1) Quality and Authentic Content, (2) Interactions/ Engagement, (3) Consistency regarding the Imagery, (4) Influencer Marketing, (5) Frequency of Postings, (6) Right utilization of Hashtags and (7) Strategy. Having all of these factors in place will therefore lead to a successful brand profile on Instagram leading to perfect utilization of Instagram's social commerce options.

What is the role of Influencer Marketing on Instagram as a social commerce platform?
In the context of Instagram, the role of Influencer Marketing has also been explored. Here it can be concluded that Influencer Marketing is highly relevant and clearly related to the success of social commerce. Therefore, Influencer Marketing plays a very important role in this context.

What are critical success factors (CSF) for using Pinterest as social commerce platform?
When it comes to Pinterest the following critical success factors are relevant for utilizing Pinterest as a social commerce platform: (1) Structured Pinterest Profile, (2) Search Engine Optimization for Pinterest, (3) Inspirational Content, (4) Frequency of Postings and (5) Optimisation of Content for Pinterest.

What platform, Instagram or Pinterest, has the highest potential regarding social commerce?
In general, both platforms have huge potential regarding social commerce. However, most of the interviews hold the opinion that Instagram has currently more potential in Germany due to its number of users and the social commerce features that are already introduced. Instead, Pinterest only offers its social commerce features in the U.S., but plans to do it in Germany as well, wherefore the potential of Pinterest as a social commerce platform should not be neglected.

How should the critical success factors be applied within a start-up company in the home textiles industry?
Last but not least, it has been investigated whether these factors also prove well for start-ups. All interviewees agreed that this is indeed the case even though start-ups might have restrictions concerning its budget and other resources. However, they might also profit from more flexibility.

6.2. Recommendation for the case company

The case company is a start-up, founded in 2017, operating in the home textiles industry. Thereby, it offers design home textiles for consumers via an online marketplace, where consumers can either buy textiles from designers or create their own textiles.

Due to the fact that the company's focus are home textiles both platforms, Instagram and Pinterest, fit well to the firm since content related to interior and home in general belong to most popular topics that work well on both platforms. Therefore, recommendations regarding the defined critical success factors will be given.

Regardless of the platform in focus, a basic brand strategy needs to be defined for the company beforehand in order to build and implement that strategy. Due to the fact that the company does not yet have any existing brand image, it is crucial to keep both, branding and commerce goals in mind and not only focus on the commerce aspect.

Further, because of its start-up nature the company has limited resources in terms of money and personnel, which implicates that all provided resources need to be used wisely.

It is therefore recommended to create an overall editorial schedule, which will serve as a guideline for content planning, content creation etc. When having such well-though-about overall plan in place, content for each platform can be wisely planned and optimised for every platform to make the most out of the existing content.

6.2.1. Instagram for the case company

High quality and authentic content is essential, wherefore a well-thought-about content plan needs to be created in order to achieve the most out of the limited resources that are provided.

Due to the fact that the company is not yet a well-known brand, enormous efforts need to be put in community building meaning that the company should try to be active on a daily basis and interact with other users that might fit to the target group of the company. In order to do so, the company should preliminary focus on Interior bloggers as well as interior and design fans.

Thereby, it is necessary to create frequent postings and stories. Here the company should strive for at least two to three postings per week and one story per week. Even though the number of postings could be higher it needs to be kept in mind that for all visual social media platforms quality of content comes before quantity, wherefore it is better to do less in the beginning instead of using content that does not fit to the brand and its predefined imagery. This is especially important as consistency plays a huge role.

However, while Instagram postings should be of high quality, the company has more freedom regarding Instagram Stories. Thereby, Instagram Stories will be something, where the company due to its start-up nature has many opportunities

to distinct itself from other companies who suffer from rules and regulations that prevent them from having a state-of-the art social media presence.

Furthermore, the company should definitely make use of the growing relevance of Influencer Marketing. In that context, it may be wise to select smaller, so-called micro influencers, who are often cheaper, but also show higher engagement rates on their Instagram channels.

6.2.2. Pinterest for the case company

Due to the fact that success on Pinterest strongly depends on the number of postings, a huge amount of suitable content is essential. However, this also implicates huge efforts regarding content creation, which would probably not be feasible for the company during the first phase. But this does not imply that the role of Pinterest is less relevant in this case. The topic of the company is perfectly suitable for Pinterest and should therefore not be neglected.

The content that the company already produces should be optimised for Pinterest as well as a well-thought-about Pinterest profile structure should be created. Therefore, the company should clearly check what works out for competition and also which topics are not yet covered by them. Further, the company should analyse which search terms are used by the Pinterest users to optimize its postings regarding these keywords and further also utilize it as a continuous pool of ideas for new and seasonal topics that are interesting for Pinterest users.

Regarding the number of pins on the different boards the company should make use of the rule suggesting that it is optimal to post 20% own content and 80% content of others.

6.3. Discussion

The result of this thesis is a set of six critical success factors that companies should take into consideration when utilizing visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms as well as specific critical success factors related to Instagram and Pinterest. Even though the CSFs are based on the visual social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest, they still leave room for generalization as they are including factors that are not only relevant for these two platforms, but are also important for other social media platforms. Some factors can even be extended to social media marketing or online marketing in general. For example, high quality and authentic content as well as frequency may also be important for other channels.
The study has provided critical success factors that are basically on operational level except from strategy and the definition of the target audience. The fact that only a few interviewees mention strategy as a CSF shows that it might be either

obvious for the interviewees to have a strategy at hand or operating successfully on the social media platforms is way more important than having a well-thought-about strategy in place. This shows that a well-thought-through strategy is simply not enough for having success. When utilizing visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms, it is much more the implementation of the strategy that counts in the end, wherefore factors like content and frequency seem to be a lot more relevant.

Furthermore, the mentioned factors are probably highly interdependent meaning that one could not state that some factors are more important than others. Due to the fact that it is dealt with critical success factors it is also not possible to skip one of them. Anyway, it can also depend on the type of brand and product which factors might be more important, wherefore each brand has to find its own way to work with these factors while the factors build a guideline for each company.

However, one may believe that the mentioned CSFs do not just come true for using visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms but also for using visual social media as a branding channels. This is true since both, sales and branding, go hand in hand which has also been confirmed by the interviewees. Having a sales strategy without willing to build up a thriving brand community simply does not work for social media. A thriving brand community therefore needs to be the basis for being successful with social commerce in general.

Moreover, the basic idea of social media has never been sales alone, wherefore it is logical that there is more to do in order to increase social commerce success than just basically promoting products without any emotional and authentic story behind it.

Anyway, this also leads to the fact that even though social commerce has its own definitions, it may not be a clear cut when it comes to a distinction between social media and social commerce. For sure it is clear that there is a relation between social media and social commerce in general, in particular as social commerce has its roots in social media but it may be less clear whether they are indeed that distinctive that they would have completely different success factors.

6.3.1. Theoretical and practical contributions

This study contributes to existing literature in the following ways. It investigates the topic of social commerce in relation to critical success factors in utilizing visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms. Thereby it complements existing literature with most important factors regarding social commerce, which has previously only been explored for social media in general (Caprano & Ergenzinger, 2013).

Further, it sheds light on what companies actively should do in practice order to succeed on social commerce, whereas the previous body of research on social

commerce primary focuses on defining the topic as well as determining factors regarding the adoption of social commerce by consumers (Gatautis & Medziausiene, 2014; Lal, 2017). Therefore, this paper provides strong practical advice for company regarding the usage of visual social media platforms.

6.3.2. Limitations

In order to end this thesis, the final chapter will reflect upon limitations and possibilities for further research on the topic.

Limitations of this study mainly arise in terms of generalizability, reliability and validity. A first limitation of the study is its nature in qualitative interviewing even though the reliability has been tried to be certified by conducting semi-structured interviews with different and independent experts.

But, only a limited number of experts could be interviewed due to time constraints. Moreover, time limitations prevented the actual testing of the obtained CSFs in an original company setting. Therefore, the critical success factors have only been validated using existing literature. However, the interview structure has been completely related to the research questions of this paper, which enhances its validity.

Further, even though current literature offers some expert opinions concerning critical success factors of social media marketing and by using visual social media platforms as social commerce platforms, this input is still quite limited. Therefore, this study is still on exploratory level to a certain extent meaning that generalizability is not that high at this point in time. One other potential limitation in this context is the scope of the literature review, wherefore it could have happened that some articles are not included within the study due to limited access of some sources meaning that some valuable findings might not have been considered during this research. However, due to a huge fit between existing literature and expert opinions, the researcher regards the generalisability of the mentioned critical success factors as quite appropriate.

Additionally, the critical success factors have not yet been verified during a quantitative study, which would have enhanced its reliability. This leads to opportunities for further research.

6.3.3. Further research

To verify and control for the validity and reliability of the research it is suggested to verify the critical success factors in a broader quantitative research. In this context, it will also make sense to work with case studies in order to verify the CSFs while investigating the cases of companies who successfully utilize the platforms and test whether the factors apply for these companies. Further, action research studies can help in testing, improving and validating the CSFs as well because the effects of the CSFs can directly be tested in practice.

Moreover, further research could build on existing studies like the one of Caprano and Ergenzinger (2013), who have classified critical success factors in relation to social media marketing into different layers. Here, one could lead the direction more into social commerce and thereby investigate not only success factors on operational level, but also on higher, strategic and organisational levels, which would be an extension of this study.

Moreover, as academic literature about critical success factors of social commerce remains rather fragmented, further research should investigate the topic in more detail and further shed a light on the distinction between social media and social commerce more precisely to investigate whether these two fields have indeed rather the same critical success factors or should be treated differently.

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8. Appendix

8.1. Appendix A: Interview Guide

General questions	Which of those two platforms, Pinterest or Instagram, do you think has the highest potential regarding social commerce? Why, why not?
Critical Success Factors for Social Commerce on Instagram	1. What do you think are the most important success factors regarding the usage of Instagram as a social commerce platform? Why? 2. What do you think is critical in order to grow on Instagram? 3. What are the most important social commerce elements of Instagram that should be used by companies or work best? 4. What do you think is special about Instagram as a social commerce platform? Why? 5. What are the biggest mistakes companies are taking when using Instagram as a social commerce platform and how can these be avoided? 6. What is your opinion about the future role of Instagram Stories and Live Videos as a marketing tool? Why? Will it grow in importance?
Critical Success Factors for Social Commerce on Pinterest	1. What do you think are the most important factors regarding the usage of Pinterest as a social commerce platform? Why? 2. What do you think is critical in order to be found and grow on Pinterest? 3. What are the most important social commerce elements of Pinterest that should be used by companies? 4. What do you think is special about Pinterest as a social media platform and what are the implications for using it as a social commerce platform? Why? 5. What is the biggest mistake companies are taking when using Pinterest as a social commerce platform and how can it be avoided? 6. What do you think will be the development of Pinterest regarding Ads

	and what are the implications for companies?
The role of social influencing	1. What do you think about the relationship between Influencer Marketing and success in social commerce? Why? 2. Which factors regarding Influencer Marketing are most relevant for social commerce? Why? 3. What do you think is key regarding the selection of Influencers? 4. To what extent do you think that companies should strive for short-term vs. long-term relationships with Influencers?
What is special regarding the critical success factors for start-ups?	The context of start-ups: 1. To what extent do you think that the success factors would differ for start-ups? If they differ: 2. What do you think is critical for start-ups in implementing their social commerce strategy on Instagram? Why? 3. What would be your advice for a start-up to build up its Instagram page? 4. What do you think is critical for start-ups in implementing their social commerce strategy on Pinterest? Why? 5. What would be your advice for a start-up to build up its Pinterest page? 6. What do you think is critical for start-ups in using Influencer Marketing in order to drive social commerce? Why? 7. What Influencer Marketing Strategy should start-ups strive for?

Table 11: Interview Questions