

**THESIS**

**Thomas Steinrücken 2010**

**Developing Online Marketing in Social  
Media for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.**



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**Developing Online Marketing in Social Media for  
DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.**

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Commissioned by: DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.

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The thesis discussed the topic of online marketing in social media. The focus was set on the social media platforms Facebook, YouTube and Flickr. Commissioner of the thesis was DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., the destination management organization for Dortmund, Germany. The research problem was to identify ways to develop online marketing in social media in a cost-efficient and innovative way in order to raise the awareness of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. and Dortmund in social media and as a destination.

The thesis is made up of two sections. One is a theoretical section that displays marketing theory in general, the online and the social media environment. The sources are books, articles and sources that were supplied by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. The other part discussed the development of marketing in social media for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. The ideas for development are based on the theoretical knowledge and my personal experiences in the field of social media marketing during my practical training for the company.

The results were found on all relevant social media platforms. Basic internal and external communication was discussed. Furthermore, the idea of user-generated content lead to the development of several ideas such as a Facebook user tour and user reports on products of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Additionally, development ideas were benchmarking, cross-channel and cross-media marketing, tag and popularity analysis and co-operation with charity organizations in social media.

The research showed that social media marketing is a field that offers many possibilities for marketers. Due to the wide spread of the internet and numerous tools to market, companies can find ideas for developing their marketing throughout the whole social media environment. But also many limitations could be recognized especially with regard to communication.

For DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. there could be found several ideas that are likely to improve their marketing in social media. The company needs to analyze the suggestions and assess the feasibility even though the resources were accounted for in the development in the process of the thesis project.

Key words: Social media, marketing, online

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Topic of the thesis project**

The topic of this thesis work is developing online marketing in social media for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. General marketing possibilities in the social media environment in the internet will be discussed. Also, the situation of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s current social media marketing will be analyzed, assessed and developed with ideas that derive from the study of various sources of information ranging from theoretical books over meetings and seminars to relevant online resources.

I chose this topic for several reasons. First, of all it can be said that online marketing with a focus on social media is a current issue and many companies are dealing with this topic currently, trying to efficiently adjust and improve their own online representations. Apart from their own websites, also communities which are popular among internet users are of interest. In this thesis the focus will be mainly on Facebook, the largest social network world wide (Crunchbase 2010), but also on other platforms such as YouTube and Flickr, the video and picture content communities. Secondly, the development in the company is tending more towards the online environment. As the new website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. was launched in March 2010 the marketing focus switches increasingly to promoting the online representation of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. To raise the awareness of the website and Dortmund as a destination in the online environment and therefore improve the infrastructure of tourism online and create a positive image are main goals. (Späte-Klein-Schmitz-Rothermund 2010.)

Furthermore, the online environment and communities offer great possibilities for companies to implement marketing with very low financial input. For a company like DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. that depends a lot on the resources given by the city of Dortmund this is an important factor. That is

because the marketing budget for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is limited to a rather small amount.

Also, for me personally there are reasons for the choice of this topic. Since my first practical training during my studies at Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences I have a large interest in online marketing. The field is always developing and changing which makes it challenging for companies and individuals to keep up with trends. Therefore, I want to develop my own knowledge in the field of online marketing, because I consider it an important and current issue and believe that considering my professional career it is also good for my personal development. The thesis will help me to increase my knowledge in the field and also to learn how to stay up to date with a certain topic and find relevant information as quickly as possible. During my advanced practical training that I completed for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. I also got very familiar with the online resources of the company. Together with my supervisors it was agreed that I will make online marketing in social media the topic for my advanced training and thesis. During my training I could already notice a strong development in my personal skills in the online environment and my professional development. I hope this thesis will further help me to work efficiently and flexibly as it is required in the online environment.

## **1.2 Methodology**

The goals of this thesis are relatively easy to describe. Firstly, the idea is to analyze the current situation of online marketing in social media of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Therefore I will analyze it by means of the theory I have studied for this thesis and by comparison or benchmarking of other destinations in the online environment, with a focus on Facebook. Additionally, from these sources and the experience I have gained during my practical trainings I will try to develop new cost-efficient ideas. The overall aim for the thesis is to suggest ways to raise awareness of the company's online representations such as their Facebook page and partly the YouTube and Flickr platforms of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Also, to create higher visitor numbers for all of these platforms is a target, which in turn can lead to higher visitors numbers on the company's own website.

As theoretical sources I will use several books about marketing in general, online marketing and marketing in social media or web2.0 from the public library in Dortmund and the resources of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. The field of online marketing in social media is a field that faces changes and new trends frequently therefore I will try to use mainly sources on online marketing that are not older than two or three years. Furthermore, I will use various articles as sources related to the topics that are found in the Elsevier database. Articles are often more up to date than books and the information is more relevant. Other sources will be material that I have collected during my training such as my notes from meetings and seminars as well as presentations of other seminars that were held on conventions related to the topic.

The thesis will follow a certain outline that will shortly be described. After the introductory part the discussion focuses on the theory concerning this topic. This will include a look at marketing in general, what it is and what goals of marketing are related to this case of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. In the following I will go more in detail into the topics online marketing and social media marketing. Here I will focus strongly on the social media marketing. In the theoretical part for social media marketing I will give an overview on the general idea of social media and explain some essential contents of the social media marketing environment.

The main part will deal with the case of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Firstly, I will describe the relevant social media platforms and the representation of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. on each platform. This will display efforts that have been already undertaken with regard to marketing by the company in order to promote Dortmund in social media. Secondly, I will, based on the information I gathered, theoretical knowledge and my own experiences, develop and examine ideas that I see suitable for the development of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s online marketing in social media. An important feature for the development of the ideas is that the focus is on non-commercial marketing. This means that the company does not want to undergo direct selling efforts, but rather improve the image and awareness of Dortmund.



Lastly, I will summarize the contents of the thesis shortly and comment on the possibilities for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. to realize and develop their online marketing efforts in social media. I will also discuss whether I was able to find ways that help to realize the goals I set out at the beginning of the thesis project.

## 2 COMMISSIONER DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.

### 2.1 Company profile

This thesis project is written for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. The company is the official tourism marketing organization for the city Dortmund. Dortmund is a city located in the west of Germany in the county North Rhine-Westphalia, in a region that just a few decades ago was the heart of the German coal and steel industry, the Ruhrgebiet. The city is now developing strongly towards the service sector and projects are done in order to make it culturally more attractive for visitors and inhabitants of the city. (Poth-Paul 2008.)

On average the city Dortmund has about 116.000 visitors per day who come into the city from outside on leisure time, business or for other reasons. Most of them however pass just one day in Dortmund and do not spend the night there.

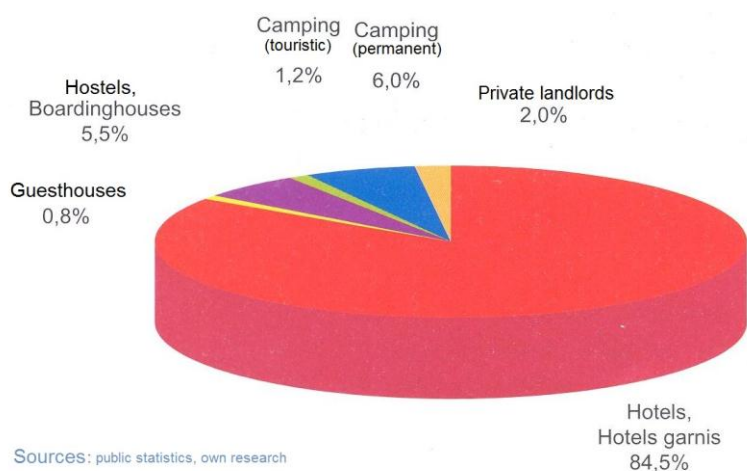


Figure 1. Overnights by type of accommodation in Dortmund (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. 2008a, 7)

Dortmund has to offer 5500 beds in the city, 84% of the beds are supplied by hotels and 5.5% are hostels or youth hostels. These are the two biggest accommodation providers in Dortmund. The rest of the beds are provided by camping, private landlords and guest houses. In 2008, the suppliers could accommodate approximately 800.000 guests. (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. 2008.)

DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is not a company as most. The company receives most of its resources from the city of Dortmund and the incorporated society it stands for. This means that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. has members from the hotel and other industries which pay a regular fee to be part of the society. E.V. stands for 'eingetragener Verein' which can be translated as incorporated society or registered association (LEO Dictionary 2010). The 104 members of the incorporated society are from the hotel industry (57), different companies (30), various associations (10) and also private people (7). However, DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. also follows its own financial interests and is trying to achieve profits. In the year 2008 an essential change occurred when DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. started co-operation with the society for economic development in Dortmund, Wirtschaftsförderung Dortmund. The economic value of the tourism industry was realized and tourism was recognized as an image factor that makes the city more attractive for visitors and inhabitants. (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. 2008.)

## **2.2 Service spectrum and touristic features of Dortmund**

The service spectrum of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. covers various areas such as the official tourist information for Dortmund, the hotel booking system for Dortmund that registers about 18.000 bookings per year. The hotel booking is one of the main income sources for the company, another large source of income are the tours that the company offers. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. organizes about 500 city tours by bus or walking per year with about 13.000 participants. Also, selling all-inclusive packages brings the company revenue. Furthermore, DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is often present at congresses, conventions and trade fairs in Dortmund. Lastly, the representation of the interests of Dortmund as a tourism destination and its marketing are core tasks of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. 2008.)

The marketing focuses on several aspects of the tourism industry in Dortmund. Meetings and congresses are an essential part of Dortmund's tourism. The center for trade fairs, the Westfalenhallen, provide vast possibilities for different congresses, conventions, meetings and trade fairs.

Another aspect that is marketed are sports, mainly referring to the local football club Borussia Dortmund that plays in the highest German division. Its stadium has a capacity of over 80.000 seats and standing ranks attracts many people from outside of Dortmund to visit the city. The stadium is also used for other events. (Signal Iduna Group 2010.) Beer and hospitality are other touristic assets for Dortmund that are also linked with the Christmas market that is popular for its 45m high Christmas tree (Dortmunder Weihnachtsmarkt 2010). Lastly, the industrial heritage that is still visible in the city is a core feature of the tourism in Dortmund. (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. 2008.)

As the name implies, the field of business is tourism and the company is comparable to a destination marketing organization. Tourism in Dortmund is mainly based on day visitors and business trips to the city. The company has twelve full-time employees, several part-time workers that support the tourist information services and there are about 40 freelancers who guide the tours organized by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. on an irregular basis. (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. 2008.)

### **2.3 Website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.**

At this point there will be a short introduction of the website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. [www.dortmund-tourismus.de](http://www.dortmund-tourismus.de) as it is relevant to the topic of online marketing in social media. The website is not the city's official information website, but the first address for visitors to Dortmund. It provides information that is useful for somebody spending just a few hours or several days in Dortmund. The information ranges from accommodation and bus tours over sights of the city, a shopping- and a restaurant-guide and information and meetings to culture, sports and nature. The main colors used on the page are red and white, the official colors of the city's coat of arms. On the homepage are links to the most interesting sections of the website, the navigation bar and a hotel-booking element. The website was designed by Raphael GmbH, a Dortmund based web-agency. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can make minor changes to the layout and major changes to the content of the website with the website administration program Typo3 that makes it possible even for beginners to administer a website.

The website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. also has a social media feature. The feature allows internet users to register on the website and therefore be able to contribute to the content of the webpage. Users can upload pictures of Dortmund, comment on the information on the website and rate products of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. such as bus tours or accommodation.

The idea is beneficial in order to get internet users, former and potential clients into exchange with the company. However, the process is relatively slow as only few users register and actually post their opinions and in some cases the comments are posted by the tour guides of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. This feature was developed together with Raphael GmbH and after editing it partially, it has reached the stage where it is the way DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. wants it to be. One goal of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is to allocate some of the information flow and exchange of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. with internet users from social media platforms to their own social media network.

### **3 MARKETING IN GENERAL**

#### **3.1 General idea of marketing**

In order to build the foundation for my suggestions to develop and improve the marketing in online social media, it is fundamental to gain an overview over marketing concepts which are relevant for the thesis. An introduction to marketing in general will be presented to understand the basic principles and the focus of this thesis. Next online marketing in general will be discussed to give an overview on the topic and environment. Then certain features of the online marketing environment that are of importance for analyzing and developing my ideas will be explained. Lastly, the social media environment in the internet will be described.

In this part of the chapter the focus is on the general idea of marketing, what it is and aspects which are relevant for the development of my marketing ideas and the company DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. will be highlighted. Afterwards, there will be a short display of recent changes in marketing that can be considered relevant for the thesis. In the next part the communication aspect of marketing will be the topic of discussion and last factors of marketing that are essential for efficient and successful marketing will be pointed out. The goal of this thesis is not to actually market products and services of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., but rather the creation of a good image in the online social media environment. The ideas developed for this thesis have no commercial implications.

Firstly, two definitions of marketing will be introduced separately. The first definition is 'marketing is an organizational function and set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders' (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 25). This definition has a strong orientation towards clients and the satisfaction and collaboration of stakeholders. It can be transferred very well to the causes of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. because the stakeholders play a large role for

DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. as first of all they are an incorporated society with many organizations benefiting of the marketing efforts of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Secondly, the city of Dortmund and the association of economic development for Dortmund are closely linked to the activities of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Furthermore, client orientation is very important for this thesis as the goal is to create an online communication channel and good image for people who are interested in Dortmund, to add value by answering questions and provide information.

The second definition says for marketing the 'aim is to reach as many representing units of a group as possible' (Kaspar 2009, 14). Also, this definition is relevant for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. because the company is trying to strongly expand its online marketing, especially in the social media environment, and reach as many people as possible on the various platforms. There is no concrete focus on certain selected targets and apart from the characteristics that may describe people using the social media platforms, there is no segmentation done at this point. The idea is to reach as many targets as possible who might receive the message

### **3.2 Progress of marketing**

In the past decades marketing has seen some changes that have altered the means and focus of marketing. One major change is the technical progress in the past decades, but also the rapid development in the last years. Production is faster, services delivered faster and more easily. Marketing now focuses on the presentation of goods and services. Also, the developments of communication devices and possibilities have changed marketing processes. From posters and television advertisements, the focus is now drifting more towards the online environment and mobile devices. At the same time as the technological development appeared the internationalization, nations and regions are connected better, borders were opened and the market was opened to most nations and especially in Europe borders ceased to exist. So marketing also finds its way increasingly to other markets and adopts trends and means from other countries to develop and find new ways to reach target groups.

Internationalization blossomed as early as the end of the Second World War, but progressed more rapidly afterwards. Also, after the Second World War there was a shortage of goods and services in almost all sectors. Demand exceeded supply and marketing was therefore relatively easy. However, circumstances changed. Even though resources are considered scarce, the supply nowadays surmounts the demand. This means for marketing that it is more important to differentiate, to create value and an image that is distinct from other suppliers in order to add value to the customer and to sell goods and services. (Reinecke – Tomczak–Kuß 2009, 9.)

Marketing continues to lose importance in many firms in times of outsourcing and financial shortages, but it is argued that a new orientation is necessary because marketing is an essential tool for the success of a company (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 5). A business oriented towards marketing is becoming more successful as its client focus, an essential feature of modern marketing, turns out to be the edge that is needed in order to compete successfully (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 21). Involving the marketing idea in an organizations philosophy or operations is vital, because a strong marketing focus usually leads to a strong identification with the location, employees and the surroundings. Especially in the tourism industry this is an important factor. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s aim is to market Dortmund as an attractive tourism destination and the authenticity and identification with the destination is a core criterion for the company. (Jablonski 2005, 33.)

Two interpretations of marketing best describe the marketing efforts of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. and also show the aim of the ideas I will develop in this thesis. The first is the non-commercial aspect of marketing. This type of marketing does not have the primary goal to sell products or services, but rather raise awareness of an organization or company. This form of marketing is most often practiced by non-profit organization, for example charity organizations. Even though DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. also has economic interests, for this project the principle of non-commercial marketing is essential and here the goal is to raise awareness and provide a large amount of information to people and make it easily accessible. The second



approach to marketing is the so-called socio marketing where marketing is more problem oriented. It can be argued that this is not the case for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., but the idea of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is to help people to find information about Dortmund and answer their questions. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 32.)

The social marketing approach leads to the next aspect of marketing, the social aspects of purchase behavior. The aim of this thesis is not to raise sales, but to raise awareness. However, the social component of possible clients is of high value. As the focus of marketing will be on Facebook and other social media, social systems play a large role for the users in those communities. Clients or users are under the influence of groups. The most suitable definition for a group was that of an influence group that is described by its own identity where users share the same values and norms, whereas more common characteristics to describe consumers or users, such as age and origin, are less important. The Facebook page of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is a group of people who at least share a common interest in the city and maybe its culture and social life and have a platform to communicate with one another. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 73.)

### **3.3 Segmentation and direct marketing**

An omnipresent idea in marketing is the concept of segmentation and clear targeting. This results from the fact that the marketing budget in companies is often limited. This is also the case for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Such a limited marketing budget allows the company to concentrate their marketing efforts on other fields. The online and social media environments show their potential at this point. Social media allow a company to get into contact with large masses of interested users at very low or even no cost. Therefore marketing efforts are more liberal and not limited in their message to a defined age group or another group. (Jablonski 2005, 103.)

Another valuable component of marketing is the direct marketing. This can be related to the case of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. in two ways. Firstly, DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can be regarded as a small-medium-sized enterprise (SME). In difference to large companies, SMEs often have a

relatively small clientele in terms of customers actually buying products and services from the company and in terms of internet users who are looking for information on Dortmund or are willing to join a community where Dortmund is present. Secondly, this small audience allows DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. a more personal and direct communication approach than it is the case for larger companies. Consequentially, the message can be crafted more efficiently and personally. (Jablonski 2005, 108.)

Direct marketing and close communication with users can help to define clear targets for a company such as DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. In some marketing literature it is discussed that setting goals is a primary feature of marketing. Setting goals provides a clear aim for a company as it encourages to reach the goals and at the same time pushes the company forward, because when a goal is reached a new goal should be defined. It is often a long and costly process to find out what feasible goals are and what the situation is currently. (Jablonski 2005, 33.) In the offline environment it certainly is, but in the online environment research can be done relatively easily.

### **3.4 Channels**

Different marketing channels have different features, advantages and disadvantages. In general these channels are usually regarded as different media, such as television, radio and newspapers. In the case of this thesis and DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., however, the channels will be different channels in the online environment, a so-called intra-media selection in the online environment. An advantage that different channels have is the reach of a channel. Some channels can reach a larger audience than others. In the social media environment this can be seen very well, in different channels DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. has largely distinct user numbers where Facebook is the channel with most attention. Also, legislation can have impacts on different channels especially in terms of copyrights. Lastly, every channel of course has a different target. For example YouTube will only reach users who are interested in videos. Flickr is a channel for pictures whereas Facebook supports all media. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 235.)

An advantage of intra-media selection of channels is the transfer of information and content to the various channels and platforms. Particularly in the online environment the transfer is simple and both time and cost efficient. Information is a key component in marketing and can have large influence on opinions, expectations and behaviors of targets and users of the online media and it can be the competitive edge for a company. (Reinecke – Tomczak–Kuß 2009, 242.)

### **3.5 SMEs and changes in Marketing**

At first, the advantages for an SME in the marketing environment will be discussed. The small number of employees and therefore flat hierarchy and fast communication allow SMEs more flexibility. This can be understood in general and economic terms, but also in marketing this is an advantage. Marketing campaigns or ideas can easily be tested and stopped before causing notable damage to the company's image and sales and corrections are made very quickly. Similar to the concept of flexibility is the point that SMEs are quick in adapting. New marketing trends and ideas can be very quickly realized, because the revision and planning process is often faster in a SME than in large companies. Thus SMEs have plenty of opportunities to realize new and creative marketing ideas shortly after they have been discovered. Combined with the flexibility in decision-making and other processes, SMEs are at an advantage compared to large companies. (Jablonski 2005, 21-25.)

It can be argued whether the small target market of SMEs is an advantage or disadvantage. On the one hand companies such as DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can reach their targets more easily and quickly and the messages sent out to the targets are often more personalized than messages from big companies. On the other hand, a small market carries the threat that a mistake in a marketing message or product can cause the loss of customers. In this case a large customer base is favorable, because the company is not as susceptible to loss of clients as a small company is. (Jablonski 2005, 21-25.)

However, as for marketing efforts of a company there are also several problems that SMEs may face. Although the small size of the target market allows a direct and personal contact with the market, it is hard for SMEs to even reach the client with marketing messages. Most of the media channels are flooded with marketing messages and promotions. Most of the messages, for example television advertisements, are simply ignored by the targets. In the internet the problem is even larger. In this environment advertising is relatively cheap with low costs per contact for advertising. Consequentially, the internet is a platform for a plentitude of advertisements and marketing messages flashing over the screens of the users. It is challenging for SMEs to deal with this problem, because often the financial resources are too limited to create a marketing message and broadcast it in the frequency and relevant media so that the targets would actually perceive the message. In SMEs there often is a lack of trained personnel, which in some cases can be traced back to the lack of resources that are needed to provide additional well-trained employees with adequate salary and working conditions. Unfortunately this is the case for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. There is one employee who is generally in charge of all online and internet related activities of the company, the website, the social media presence and research. This largely limits the efforts that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can undertake in the internet, because one person is limited in his or her possibilities. (Jablonski 2005, 25.)

Another important factor for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is the dependency on public money coming from the city of Dortmund. A large part of the personnel costs and other activities is paid with this financial support. This money is limited and the financial freedom of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is strongly restrained. Even though the company earns and keeps the revenue generated from selling products and services, the marketing budget is small. This problem calls for marketing means that are cost-efficient and preferably do not generate costs at all. A focus on the online and social media environment is beneficial as advertisements and marketing campaigns can be very cheap or even completely free. (Jablonski 2005, 30.)

Major changes for the marketing environment can also be recognized from the development of target markets where general characteristics have strongly changed over the past years. In the modern heterogeneous target markets it is difficult to describe characteristics that define a group. In theory it has been noticed that the clientele is getting older on average as fewer children are born and people live longer. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 5.) Also, in the online communities rising numbers of people at an age of 50 or higher are registered. Nevertheless, the main targets that are considered in this thesis are the users of social media and these are usually between 25 and 54 years, i.e. younger than the majority of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s clients. (Pingdom 2010.) This circumstance creates a dilemma for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. because most of the products and services are bought by senior citizens and not by people between 25 and 54 years of age.

Marketers argue that traditional characteristics to describe targets and target markets no longer grasp the spectrum of features that form the knowledge for efficient marketing (Kaspar 2009, 22). A more significant approach is to define targets by lifestyles. These lifestyles show the interests of possible targets and express their way of life while encompassing social, cultural and economic differences. In social media this feature of target markets becomes even more visible as the majority of people in Germany have regular access to the internet, almost 70%, and many of them are part of social networks (Netzpolitik.org 2009).

However, marketers describe new and different characteristics that can be used to identify possible targets for a company. Physical and traditional attributes are losing importance and the new characteristics are related more to the state of mind. Researchers in the field have found out that consumers tend to give more thought to their decisions, comparing prices and evaluating options to the product. The supply is higher than the demand and therefore it is up to the marketers to create a competitive edge that convinces consumers to believe their product is the best. Saturation of the market creates another phenomenon apart from decision-making processes of consumers. Suppliers compete for the favor of consumers and fight price-battles, blame one another for mistakes and constantly try to give the

consumers the best product possible. This harsh competition between suppliers keeps driving the standards of products higher. As the quality of products and services improves the consumers get higher expectations and are more critical towards products. Another feature is egoism among consumers who seek more and more for their personal satisfaction. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 5.)

The last changes that will be discussed are scandals and the awareness of those. There have always been scandals and for example working conditions a century ago were inhumane according to current standards. Nonetheless, scandals attract increasing attention in the modern economies, due to an increased sense of social responsibility and broader media-coverage consumers are aware of scandals and punish companies by not purchasing their products anymore. Consequentially, the principle of social responsibility becomes a part of company cultures in order to minimize negative headlines. At the same time also ecologic and cultural responsibility are valued higher. The internet and its features have not been free of scandals and even apart from the scandals and skepticism the internet is considered a main feature of the development in marketing. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 5.)

### **3.6 What is important in marketing?**

In the last part the ideas of segmentation and targeting were discussed. Different characteristics were described and the change in profiling possible targets and consumers was in focus. For a company it is important to know what people they are communicating with, therefore they need to know what clientele, at least in a rough outline, they want to contact. As this thesis deals with the topic of online marketing in social media, it is vital for the company to know how and why users are using the different channels that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is present on in the internet environment and what kind of characteristics or interests they share. This also helps DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. to design their messages to a degree that is suitable for the audience and fulfills the needs of the users. (Jablonski 2005, 72.)

Values are in any case an essential feature of any company and its organization and culture. In many organizations this is realized and expressed in company's standards and guidelines for doing business. In the case of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., the whole company submits to quality standards that are described by the German Tourism Association, Deutscher Tourismusverband. It is important for a company to commit to quality standards if they are accepted and at the same time realize and acknowledge those in their day to day activities, including marketing efforts. (Jablonski 2005, 34.) Such a commitment to quality and official quality standards also generates trust, which can be considered one of the most valuable assets in marketing. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 37.)

Additionally, the past has proven that anticipation often makes the difference between a successful and an underperforming company. A good example is Nokia, a company that produced tires and rubber boots, but saw that in future the communication habits will change and focused on the production of mobile phones and other mobile devices. Nowadays Nokia struggles in this market, because they failed to respond to relevant trends. Thus the prediction of future developments and trends can make the difference, also in the marketing environment. However, this is a difficult task in the internet. Changes occur in short spans of time and it is challenging for companies to stay up to date with recent developments. Even during this thesis project circumstances will change and may make some of the ideas obsolete. Yet, for any company it is indispensable to follow or predict new trends. (Jablonski 2005, 47.)

A popular trend is co-operative marketing. The core of this approach to marketing efforts is that companies share resources in order to reach a larger number of targets while reducing the usage of resources. In most cases all parties of the co-operation benefit of this approach. Naturally there are also problems connected with this idea. To market in a co-operation the planning has to be done carefully in order to allocate resources and distribute messages timely and in line with the agreement. In the internet, though, there are many possibilities to use resources of other users for own purposes. (Jablonski 2005, 104.)

Companies can often maintain or obtain a good market position due to their special features and a special feature has a larger influence on profitability than a good general market situation. Co-operative marketing may even allow access to these special features of a company and help to benefit of a specialty that a company cannot offer but another can. Yet, in the market it is important for a company to analyze what its feature might be that distinguishes it or creates advantage over competitors. (Reinecke – Tomczak–Kuß 2009, 51.)

The last relevant aspect is the definition of goals for marketing. Goals can be considered obsolete in SMEs where development might be stagnating or slow, but there are several reasons why goals should be included in marketing strategies and efforts. Goals have a controlling effect on marketing campaigns, when a goal is defined, the success of a marketing campaign can be controlled much better. In order to set out a goal the current situation has to be analyzed and this gives a company a good impression of what development is feasible. Additionally, the content of a goal gives marketing plans and strategies a clear outline for what is to be achieved and the goal size can be a reflection of the effort that should be put into the project. (Jablonski 2005, 51.)

### **3.7 Communication in marketing**

This part will concentrate on the communication aspect of marketing. Many marketing professionals see this as the most important aspect because this is what actually delivers the message and determines how it is perceived by targets (Jablonski 2005, 69; Kaspar 2009, 14-15; Reinecke – Tomczak–Kuß 2009, 242; Schwarz 2007, 59). Because this thesis will talk about interaction with internet users on social media platforms, communication is vital for the outcome of this project so it is important to address this part of marketing specifically. Communication enables a company to get into an exchange process with its environment, get feedback and create reactions by the recipients. Another goal of communication is to spawn awareness among the targets of the message and change the behavior of the recipients. In general the desired change in behavior is from a non-purchase behavior to a



purchase behavior. Still marketers face a problem that has been increasing steadily over the past years. Media are increasingly flooded with marketing messages. Therefore, the targets are over saturated with messages, a phenomenon that makes it challenging to actually reach the targets of a message efficiently. (Jablonski 2005, 69.)

Marketers describe three basic strategies of communication on three levels. The first level is the informative level when information is distributed and communicated. There is no intent by marketers to influence the purchase behavior or opinion of targets, information is the sole purpose of such a message. The second level is the emotional level. On this level marketers deliver a message that addresses emotional concerns of the targets to create a reaction on the message delivered, for example to generate a purchase or attract attention and a response. The third level combines the informative and emotional levels. Information is combined with a message that addresses targets also on the emotional level and therefore combines the effects of the first two levels, information and an emotional reaction to the message. Consequentially, communication informs and influences the targets and gives companies an opportunity to present themselves to the public. Also, it gives the targets a chance to respond to the messages of a company. (Reinecke – Tomczak–Kuß 2009, 244.)

As discussed earlier SMEs such as DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. tend to have more direct contact to customers than large companies, in this sense an SME has an advantage that it needs to use. (Jablonski 2005, 69.)

Direct communication does not only mean that a company directly contacts a consumer or user in the internet, but it also means that the addressee has a chance to respond to the message and exchange information and opinions with a company. For any company, especially SMEs it is therefore critical to provide a response element to addressees. In the case of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. there are many possibilities for addressees to respond. They can use the contact form on the official website, contact employees by email, register to the built-in social web platform on the company's website or use one of the social media platforms that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is part of. Accordingly, DORTMUNDtourismus

e.V. has a solid foundation for exchange with clients and users of the internet platforms where the company is represented. (Jablonski 2005, 108.)

Direct communication fosters the exchange of information and opinions with users and consumers and individuals also create an association with a company due to messages and communication. In that sense it is important for a company that focuses its marketing on two-sided communication, the way it could be beneficial to be for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., to set psychographic goals before economic goals. This means an approach that solves problems of users and allows them to contact and interact with a company and therefore is more beneficial for both sides. Another characteristic of this approach is that companies do not communicate a direct buying demand, but rather a long term message that enhances the image and relation to a company. In the long run this strategy will lead to trust and possibly to a purchase decision by the recipients of a message. In order to support this possibility the communication should be repetitive on channels to amplify the learning effect. As explained earlier, the recipients of a message build a relationship with a company by linking new information with old knowledge, so repeating the contact fosters the learning effect of recipients. (Jablonski 2005, 51, 71.)

## 4 ONLINE MARKETING GENERAL

### 4.1 Opportunities and challenges

The focus of this part will be the marketing environment in the internet in general. Disadvantages and advantages of the internet will be discussed shortly and crucial influences for a company like DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. will be presented.

Between the years 2005 and 2006 there has been an immense rise in expenses for online marketing means by companies of 84% and by 2006 about 65% of the world's population had access to the internet from home or another location (Schwarz 2007, 6). This appears to be an impressive number, in reality however many companies, especially SMEs struggle hard to have sufficient financial resources to successfully market in the internet and low budgets usually limit the marketing efforts to certain targets. Appropriate co-ordination of marketing efforts is necessary to achieve the goals that are defined. It is essential for companies to identify and realize the opportunities the internet offers to carry out efficient and cost-effective marketing means. Direct marketing and direct communication are advantages that SMEs have in comparison to larger companies. These advantages, if successfully applied in marketing strategies, allow efficient use of resources and can help to convey a message to the targets. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 262.)

The internet is a main feature of development in almost all fields of business and also the marketing is strongly affected by it even though there are many scandals and setbacks. These scandals and problems raise the awareness and importance of social responsibility. In the online environment it is more crucial for companies to have a risk management plan in order to respond quickly and subtle to possible scandals. Due to the interconnectedness in the internet negative reports of a company's failure or inappropriate working methods spread rapidly. A company has to respond just as quickly to these events. In many cases the news and articles about failure are most visible in the internet, for example in search engines like Google and yahoo.

Nonetheless, just as the information spreads quickly the time that it attracts attention in the internet is also reduced. (Kaspar 2009, 21.)

On the one hand this is positive as bad influences on internet users' behavior disappear quickly. On the other hand it also forces companies to respond quickly to problems. In the case of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. it can be said that there have not occurred any major problems or scandals which could have done great harm to the company's image. Yet, there is a conflict, because DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. as the official tourism marketing organization for Dortmund is partly also responsible for the image of the destination Dortmund and reactions to events that occur in Dortmund can be important. Therefore the company should respond to events that influence the attractiveness of Dortmund as a destination.

An advantage of online marketing is that the costs per contact to internet users are low compared to other mass media such as television or radio. This circumstance grants many companies the possibility to promote their information in the internet. Therefore, the environment is overloaded with information and thus the effects of many messages that are spread are decreased. (Reinecke – Tomczak–Kuß 2009, 246.) One way to overcome this problem is to combine different media or media channels. For the internet this implies that it is beneficial to use the own website as a resource of marketing, social media and content platforms. It is crucial for a company to create a consistent message on all channels in order to minimize the confusion that may appear when internet users receive the message. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 262.)

Also, the structure of the marketing messages needs to be relevant to the recipient in a way that a delivered message should meet the use patterns of internet users. For example an internet user who watches videos on YouTube has no interest in seeing a video that is filled with text and needs to be read, whereas an internet user who is active on blogs or blogging him/herself might be more curious to read an informative text. Positively it can be said that in difference to the earlier times when the internet got accessible for the broad public the trust in it was very low. But in the last

years trust in the services and messages that were and are available online increased, so for marketers creating trust might not be of the highest priority anymore. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 235.)

## **4.2 Advantages**

Apart from problems of marketing in the internet that were explained shortly, there are also plenty of advantages. In particular SMEs can benefit of the internet as a marketing tool.

The internet allows companies to easily reach international and oversea markets. In general this can be confirmed but for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. at this stage it cannot be considered relevant for two reasons. The current idea of marketing is to attract mainly visitors from the expanded proximity of the city meaning a diameter of about 300km around the city. Secondly, the budget does not allow the company to purchase professional translation services for the website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Hence, the website will only be available in German for now. Consequentially, it is not beneficial for the image to market outside of Germany when the information is available only in German. (Schwarz 2007, 59.)

An advantage of marketing in the internet is that it makes efficient targeting relatively easy, because there are many pages and communities that are dedicated to certain topics or interests. For a company it offers the opportunity to quickly find relevant contacts for marketing and target messages well. When talking about communities it is also an interesting phenomenon that targets actually come to where the marketing message is distributed. When a company creates a page in Facebook people who are interested in the topic of the page will search and find the information independently. As the internet and its content are available at any time of the day the timing of messages is more flexible. (Schwarz 2007, 59.)

An aspect of the internet that also surpasses traditional media is the interactivity that it facilitates. On almost all platforms and official websites there are contact forms or other possibilities to get into contact with the owner of a website or content in the internet. Whereas in traditional media

channels the targeting is usually done carefully and explicitly, the internet gives companies the opportunity to reach users who are usually not targets of the marketing messages, but those also receive the message and are potential clients or multipliers. (Schwarz 2007, 33.) In the internet appears the electronic word of mouth which is also referred to as a multiplier effect that spreads rapidly. If information appears on a website the owner reaches more people than he or she would if just telling the news to friends. This effect is put into force for both positive and negative word of mouth and opinions are distributed quickly. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 86.) But it is feasible in the internet to let users and clients influence and develop the online presentation of a company by engaging communication concerning the current stage of the presentation (Schwarz 2007, 59).

However, creation and administration of a website do not automatically attract users or clients. A high awareness is needed for a website to get many visitors and develop a good conversion rate. The conversion rate describes how many visitors to a website it takes in order to achieve an interaction with the website and the internet user. Raising the awareness of a website is the one principle aim of marketing in the internet and online environment. (Kauppinen 2009.) Another advantage of internet in difference to traditional media is the multimedia perception value. The traditional media are often limited in media, radio only allows audio, television may allow video and audio, but the internet has the possibility to offer messages in form of audio, video and text, even all at once. (Reinecke – Tomczak–Kuß 2009, 245.)

At this point the features of websites that are most valued by internet users will be discussed to find out what users look for in the internet. Exemplarily, the rise of social media platforms allows internet users to exchange information and opinions at will. Users got accustomed to the option to rate and comment topics or media in the internet and users value the possibility to easily and quickly give feedback on content. The rating system is preferably connected with a recommendation system which users can apply in order to give friends hints on what are good products or what is good content. Pictures and 3D views are also vital elements in order to give users an

impression of content and products. Videos, however, are not among the most valued features of a webpage. (Schwarz 2007, 60.)

Yet, marketing messages in the internet should not primarily be designed in order to inform recipients but rather to show a creative, funny or interesting message that generates desire of the user to search more information. A marketing message in the internet should always have a link to a page where more information on the topic of the message can be found. In large companies there is a team of marketers that develop creative messages together, but SMEs are often limited in resources and personnel. It is best for an SME to have a creative employee in charge of messages that are send out online. (Schwarz 2007, 69.) In DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. one employee who is in charge of administering the website and other online presences of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is responsible for the messages, their content and the way they are written.

Lastly, a feature of the internet is that marketing research can be done easily, because there are many tools and programs, free of charge, that allow internet users and administrators to monitor traffic on websites in the internet. The measurement of traffic and behavior of users on a website facilitates a better planning and control of marketing means and campaigns based on the information gathered. The internet also makes it easier for companies to conduct research with the own resources by using surveys on the own website. Many of the measurement tools also allow administrators of websites to daily see the development of visits to the websites and the navigation of users on the website. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 307.)

DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. utilizes Google's tool GoogleAnalytics in order to measure and analyze visits to the website [www.dortmund-tourismus.de](http://www.dortmund-tourismus.de). The definition given on the website of Google Analytics is 'Google Analytics is the enterprise-class web analytics solution that gives you rich insights into your website traffic and marketing effectiveness' (Google 2010). This definition shows that the service is specifically designed for companies in order to simplify online market research in form of statistics about traffic on the website. This free online service offers information on traffic of a website on

many different accounts. Simple monitoring of visitor numbers can be done, customized profiles show users what they are most interested about. Setting goals is possible and GoogleAnalytics measures the progress, mobile devices can be tracked and even benchmarking with similar websites, by size and traffic, is possible. These are a few features of GoogleAnalytics and it helps companies to simply and quickly learn about the traffic on their website and the development related to it. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. mainly uses it to monitor visitor numbers and analyze which outside pages are responsible for visitors coming from other webpages. (Google 2010.)



## **5 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING**

### **5.1 Basics for social media marketing resulting from Marketing**

Direct marketing allows companies to target their messages well and avoid a loss of the message in the information flood that characterizes modern media channels. It becomes increasingly important if it is considered that communication is often regarded as the most important marketing tool especially because it allows exchange with the environment of a company. (Jablonski 2005, 103.) The internet environment allows companies to get into contact with their clients easily and provides possibilities to individualize or create personal messages (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 260).

This criterion becomes more significant because a main purpose of marketing is to influence awareness, opinions and behaviors of the message's recipients. Different channels achieve different results in different ways, but the internet provides the means to reach a broad audience with a relatively individualized message. (Jablonski 2005, 84.) As users in the internet are increasingly active and critical, a company that markets online has to be explicit with the choice of message, its design and reach. The multiplier effect in the online environment was explained earlier and the more critical users become the more important it is to transmit messages that are ethically sound. Finding the balance is a major challenge for marketers. (Netzvitamine 2009a.)

In order to find out about users reactions to messages that are spread online, it is vital to have response elements for users to get directly into contact with a company. Feedback is essential in order to develop the processes of a company, to measure and analyze success of different activities. Furthermore, users want to form and design the internet environment they are active in. For the satisfaction of users it is crucial for a company or website to offer possibilities where users can express their opinions, concerns and criticism. (Netzvitamine 2009a.)

Traditionally response elements were email contacts and forums, however, some developments changed the situation. New social software allows users to publish their own content and have influence on the pages of interests they are active on. New software also created a more heterogeneous user profile in the internet, in earlier days the so-called “nerds” were mostly active online, but nowadays almost everybody uses the internet regularly also for social reasons. So online social media emerged and created a new way of social life in the internet. Just shortly after companies made these social platforms accessible for commerce, for example Google’s GoogleAdSense. (Kaspar 2009.)

To form a picture of the development of social media it can be seen that, for example with relevance to the tourism industry, about 11% of the search results of travel related information search are links to social media. Everybody has experience with search engines and the often fragmented and strange search results of search show that 11% is a large number. (Xiang–Gretzel 2010, 6.) Facebook was able to register 100 million new users in just 9 months (Netzvitamine 2009a). These figures show the importance and rapid growth of social media.

## **5.2 Definitions**

Social media is a broad idea and there are different approaches to definitions. Three definitions will be discussed at this point in order to get a better impression of what social media actually is.

The first definition says that ‘social media can be generally understood as Internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content’, and that it is formed to educate each other in the internet environment (Xiang–Gretzel 2010, 1). This definition is clear and describes that social media is based on specific software that allows users to contribute their own content, meaning ideas, opinions and media to the different platforms.

A more specific definition was drafted by Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006, 2) who describe social media as ‘a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on

educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues'(Blackshaw - Nazzaro, 2004, 2). However, this definition does not include that social media are based on special software, but simply speaks of different sources created by consumers. The content is mainly generated by users, but almost every social media website is run by a company or organization that provides the platform for users. This definition also regards users who are active in social media as consumers. It needs to be understood that social media is not only used by consumers, because a lot of social media pages are not about products, but rather about interests or information on non-commercial topics. This definition by Blackshaw and Nazzarro describes the content created by users more specifically but it fails to mention interests which out of my own experience are usually the reason for internet users to join a social media community.

The last explanation defines social networking sites as 'those sites driven by user-participation and user-generated content. Social media provide a variety of ways for users to become involved with organizations' (Waters–Burnett–Lamm–Lucas 2009, 2). This definition talks about users and not consumers who contribute to the content created in social media, considering that social networking sites are generally speaking a part of social media. The definition also involves the idea that social media give users, organizations and companies the opportunity to get into contact and share information and opinions. In that sense the definition by Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas is most relevant to this thesis project.

Social media is considered part of the web2.0 which is a term that is primarily used to describe the time-span of the current developments and issues in the internet environment. Web2.0 involves a new way of communication that allows a dialogue of even partners that before in web1.0 were considered on different levels. Social media is an aspect of web2.0 that facilitates the contact and exchange of users who earlier were considered on a lower level in the hierarchy than companies. In order to create an even dialogue it is essential for the companies that are active in social media to create a profile with maximum transparency to foster trust. (Kaspar 2009, 14.)

Social media does not only allow companies and users or consumers to get into contact. Social media also gives unlimited opportunities for consumers, who might have bought the same product or are interested in it, to get into contact and exchange opinions. (Mangold–Faulds 2009, 2.) Some online marketing experts argue that this is a radical change in communication behavior, not only considering the hierarchy, but also the intensity of communication and content that is created. Also, the possibility for consumers to get into contact with each other is new. Earlier, consumers could talk about a product in a shop or with close friends, now they have a much better foundation to distribute their opinions and experiences with products or services. (Netzvitamine 2009a.) Subsequently, it can be said that consumers want to communicate with people who have similar interests and create networks. Companies can benefit of this situation and create relevant communities for consumers that are interested in the companies' activities or developments. (Mangold–Faulds 2009, 5.)

### **5.3 The users in online social media**

This new form of the internet allows quick publications and spread of messages through the online environment. Users are largely involved in the distribution of messages as they share news that they read with friends and contacts in other social media and their own networks. For example blogs and Facebook are platforms to share new information and comment on it. The interconnectedness of platforms makes information flow fast and the technical features make it easy for users to copy or link to the original messages. Consequentially, in many cases the original message that was published by a company is not significantly altered. There are also cases when users have a negative attitude towards a company and freely adjust a message in order to deteriorate the image of a company. However, social media presence requires companies to give up control about part of the content in order to successfully communicate. (Kaspar 2009, 43.)

The term user is often mentioned in this thesis and its meaning is considered to be clear. Still at this point a look at different types of users gives an impression on what users are looking for in social media and in how far they can be relevant for marketers.

The first user type is a passive user who receives information without actively searching for it. For these users it is important to have easy access to information, preferably by just one or two actions on a website. With regard to the creation and adjustment of content this group is not interesting. Nonetheless, the passive users form a large part of internet users and therefore give marketers the possibility to spread their reach by sending messages to the passive users. (Kaspar 2009, 22.)

Similar to the passive users are the so-called followers. These users are interested in specific information or topics. Like the passive users they do not create content, but in difference they actively search for information about topics or products. Thinking about marketing efforts the followers actually will find marketing messages by themselves as they are searching for a company and its products or another topic of concern. Consequentially, it is easy to reach this group and it does not require complex targeting efforts. (Kaspar 2009, 22.)

Multipliers are principally the same as followers in their search for information. However, multipliers to some extent create content by sharing what they find with other users. If they find an interesting article or news-cast they are likely to forward it to friends or contacts that are also interested in the topic. (Kaspar 2009, 22.)

Mega-multipliers are considered the most important user type in social media. These users in many cases have own platforms that are dedicated to a field of interest. When they read a message they are likely to refer to it on their own platforms and comment on it. Their platforms usually inform other users who are interested in this topic and therefore create a strong multiplier effect. Besides multiplying a message this user group is also responsible for discussions on topics and can raise the awareness of a company. Meta-multipliers are almost the same kind of users though they do not actively search for information, but they get informed about news and messages. (Kaspar 2009, 22.)

It can be said that the social media environment was created for users to share content and participate in discussions, thus creating a social environment. In this way users can discover new information and opinions that can have a large influence on their behavior. To some extent social media also have a large economic importance. Users like to exchange information about products and companies and the opinions they read can have impact on their purchase decisions. The phenomenon that users search information in social media about products is called presuming, which means that they get all information available for them on a product before consuming it. (Netzvitamine 2009a.)

#### **5.4 Features of social media**

This part will discuss features of the online social media environment that are influential on marketing in this area. Apart from basic principles that are universally realized for appropriate communication in communities and social media, there will also be discussions about communities and other ideas that are considered to be relevant for this thesis project.

Transparency is of high importance in the social media in order to create an image of trust and equality. Past crises have caused rising awareness throughout the public and for a company that is active in social media and marketing there disclosure is a must. There are many means for a company to disclose the own presentation in social media. Apart from a company's description, hyperlinks to the company's own website grant users the chance to learn about the company and create an image in order to understand why the company has a certain kind of presentation in a social media channel. Another important means to create a connection for users and let a company be identified is the use of logos and visual elements that stand for the company and its activities. (Waters–Burnett–Lamm–Lucas 2009, 1.)

Creating a disclosed and honest online presentation builds trust in the company in the sense that users know about the purposes and activities of a company. In consequence the company gains acceptance in the social media environment and reduces the risk to be accused of malpractice or surreptitious advertising on public pages. (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 231.)

Users in social media are often connected with hundreds of other users and the post of one user is visible by these hundreds of people who may react to it and another hundred people get to know about it and the message is multiplied. The electronic word of mouth in that sense takes place on a much bigger scale than in regular social life where people often tell only few friends about experiences with products and they do not make the information accessible for the whole community. In that way the effect and importance of multipliers in social media are increasing. (Mangold–Faulds 2009, 2.) Users are also active in other social media environments where they might spread a message. Consequentially, it is worth for companies to extend their activities in social media to several platforms and interlink those. Then a link from a post can lead the user to another social media platform where the same information, but different media is available, thus raising value for the user. (Shuen 2008, 31.) It is essential for companies to realize this potential in the positive and negative aspect, because it carries a lot of marketing potential.

Communities are a large part of the social media environment and are most visible in form of social networking sites like Facebook and content pages like YouTube and Flickr. SMEs such as DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can gain benefits from communities, because it augments the audience that receives a message from the company. A company can benefit from a community without investing much time and money. In the social media environment users are looking for information on topics and look to network with other users who share interests, so communication often finds participants by itself. Nonetheless, a community should be relevant on the emotional and informative level and catch the users' interest. Uniqueness and innovation contribute to the positive image and development of a community. Additionally, an organization should allow a certain loss of control with regard to the conversations that users lead in a community. Restrictions and limitations to the users of a community result in loss of users and a slow but steady decrease in the quality and success of a community. One way to have influence on conversations in a community for a company is by starting discussions about topics that are relevant for the company as well as for the users. (Mangold–Faulds 2009, 2.) It was observed recently that users protect themselves from irrelevant information due to the amount of information that

is distributed in social media. Messages that molest or are irrelevant for users can therefore result in the decrease of user numbers and deteriorate the image of a company. (Netzvitamine 2009a.)

According to Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas there are four levels that make a community attractive. Locality, level one, is important, in many cases locals are the ones who identify themselves most with a company that is operating in the proximity. As a result a company creates an identity as level two that is linked to the locality factor and gives the company and its community a certain image. With regard to the third level a community needs to be interesting to the targets in order to attract users. Lastly the circumstances of a company, the community and the online environment have an impact on the attractiveness of a community, level four. Any community, whether a company runs its own community or is part of an already existing community, needs long term maintenance and commitment. Continuous investments of time and resources in a community create a clear picture of the community and the company presented for the users. (Kaspar 2009, 11, 45.) A lack of commitment on the one hand causes the decay of a community and on the other hand results in inefficient use of social media. Many organizations that join social media do not use the resources on the platforms to the optimum. Facebook allows users to post pictures, videos, audios and text but many organizations post only text and pictures. (Waters–Burnett–Lamm–Lucas 2009, 4.)

### **5.5 User-generated content**

User-generated content is an important aspect of the social media environment and will be presented in this part. A short explanation and advantages of user-generated content in comparison with self-generated content give an overview for this topic.

A definition for user-generated content describes it as ‘a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences, and even rumor’ (Blackshaw & Nazarro2006, 4). This definition covers almost all aspects of user-generated content. It shows that user-generated content in many cases is based on facts, but also includes that the



users post it from their personal point of view with their personal opinion included. User-generated content therefore are facts written from a very personal perspective in order to share information with other users who are influenced by the opinions of others. (Xiang–Gretzel 2010, 2.)

User-generated content answers two questions a company usually asks itself when joining the social media environment; how should users be involved? How can money for marketing be saved? The providers of tools for both questions are the users themselves. Firstly, the collection of user-generated content allows the users to be involved in the communication and community of a company and it also gives them a chance to voice their opinion and discuss it with other users. Secondly, the collection of user-generated content is usually free of charge as soon as a community is established. It can be argued whether or not and to which extent it is appropriate to filter and display user-generated content. Therefore it is useful to create short guidelines for users that describe allowed and disallowed content. Additionally, the administrators of a community should make sure that content is correctly labeled. The author of content should be easy to recognize to ensure an appropriate and honest exchange of information and opinions. (Kaspar 2009, 11, 19.)

The main advantage of user-generated content is that it is always up-to-date. The content is created by users who are very interested in a topic and regularly follow news channels that deal with their interest. Consequentially, they can quickly forward new information and contribute it to a collection of user-generated content. This way the databases of user-generated content are likely to be always current. Committed users also create media that is relevant to a topic. Users make videos or pictures of their own experiences or audio reports and reviews. If the possibility is given in the community users can therefore complement the media library of a community. (Kaspar 2009, 37.)

It is often a company that runs a community, therefore it can be said that users who are part of the community are interested and have a lot of knowledge in the field of the company. Consequentially, the information that

is contributed by users can be of very high quality and can even exceed the knowledge of the employees who are administering and posting in the community. In some cases companies hire professional writers to post in their communities, yet well-educated users have a lot more knowledge in the field and can contribute strongly to the relevance and quality of a community. (Kaspar 2009, 37.)

Lastly, companies sometimes fail to use media channels and social media platforms to their full extent. Collecting user-generated content of course is beneficial, but in turn it is advantageous for a company to distribute their own information and media. On the one hand it educates users about the activities of the company. On the other hand specific copyrights on media make it possible for other users to distribute this media via their own activities in the internet. Hence, the information spreads from the owner of a platform to their other social media platforms where it reaches more users. (Netzvitamine 2009a.)

A circumstance that is a large challenge for companies operating in the social media environment is that only few users actively produce content. Wikipedia for example has 7.4 million registered users, of those 1% adds or adjust content to Wikipedia and another 1.8% of only those are responsible for 72% of the content. In general it can be said that about 1-3% of the users in social media actually contribute content to communities. Therefore it is crucial for companies to activate and reward this small percentage of users in order to develop the value of their community. (Shuen 2008, 128.)

## **5.6 Marketing principles for social media**

After an overview of main ideas and concepts in the social media world the discussion will now focus on tools and possibilities that help in marketing a company or in case of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. a destination. Communication should be repetitive on different channels in order to remind the users of a message and let users learn about offerings of a company. The message should avoid a direct buying demand, but rather convey a long-term message that educates users and recipients about advantages and possibilities that are offered. (Jablonski 2007, 72.)

For a company that engages in the social media world it is important to regularly post news or other messages on the platforms. There are several aspects that need to be taken into consideration in order to reach a level of messages that are along the same line and style. The employees who are responsible for posts in social media should know the daily business and products of a company to be able to answer questions, but also to be sure about current issues and information in the company. Principally in DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is only one employee who is responsible for posts in social media. However, this employee might be ill or on holiday every once in a while then a substitute needs to keep posting to inform users about news and events. But different people have different writing styles post and answer differently to users, therefore a company should have a structure and rules for the employees to post. It is necessary because the posts should be in the same fashion, varying styles and information backgrounds can cause confusion among the users. (Bauhuber 2010.)

Posting is more or less jargon of the social media environment. A short display of the various ways how to post messages in social media will clarify what posting is. Links to external news about a company are a very popular form of posting a message in social media. A short headline gives the readers an idea of the topic and a link leads back to the company's website where the user can find more information. At the same time this is a way to redirect traffic from social media to the own website. To be more attractive news can also include different media which are limited depending on the platform they are posted on. Nonetheless, media can also be posted independently to simply show users an interesting video or audio file. Normally the media used in posts is created by a company, but media created by users can have a positive impact on the perception of the post by other users. (Waters–Burnett–Lamm–Lucas 2009, 1.)

In most social media the users join a community to learn or discuss with others about a topic or activity they are interested in, so the users have an emotional link to a community. Consequentially, the decisions of users that are in a community are usually not rational, but lead by emotions. In response the company administering and posting in a community should post

in an emotional way that is appealing to the users. The emotional side of a post can be supported by different media though pictures are often the most efficient way. Video, audio and text require more time and effort by the users to perceive whereas pictures give a quick impression. Using dynamic language will also support the effect of a message. (Netzvitamine 2009b.) Dynamic language can be described as 'using words particularly verbs and phrases that indicate action' (Vonhof 2006).

As communities are dedicated to a certain topic the users who participate in it identify themselves with the community and topic, it is essential for the administration of the community to create authenticity. Authenticity is an important concept, but it can quickly be exploited or over-used by using imagery or jargon excessively. Hence, the employees posting in a community must be aware of this dilemma and carefully post messages. (Netzvitamine 2009b.)

A possibility for companies to allow creation of new information by users on their own online premises is to create own communities that allow users to express their thoughts and share ideas. Creating a community however is expensive and in the case of an SME it takes a long time until it is actively used. So it takes a lot of long-term effort to start up an own community. Another possibility is to join an already existing community or social network that allows a company to create an own profile where users can find information and express their own opinions. (Schwarz 2007, 61.) A crucial point is that companies should not try to control or command users or even go so far as to expel them from a community as long as they do not violate the rules. Social media are constructed to exchange information and opinions and a company participating in social media should be aware that also negative information will be posted. Companies should motivate users to participate in the community and share their knowledge with others in a critical but constructive way. (Kaspar 2009, 9.)

For users it is often entertaining and more interesting when they can see other users use a product or service or deal with topics that are interesting in other ways. This approach engages users and at the same time delivers

information that the company wants to distribute. It was stated before that feedback is an essential feature for companies to operate in the online and social media environment. This also accounts for the communication between the company and customer or users, but in this case also for the communication between users and users. A discussion between users only will allow an intensive exchange of information. In order to spread a message in social media it can also be helpful to contribute to other platforms that are related to topics that a company wants to discuss (Mangold–Faulds 2009, 5-6).

For DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. as a destination marketing organization it can also be efficient to extend communication to other communities or pages that are relevant to events or topics that are current in Dortmund. Nonetheless, the posts need to be informative, on-target and they should be designed to create a connection between the event and Dortmund as a destination. (Bauhuber 2010.) It is inevitable to display full disclosure to the users (Mangold–Faulds 2009, 5).

A message can also be efficiently distributed through users who have tried products or services and are in the relevant social media communities. These users can be allowed certain benefits by the company like gifts or discounts. On the one hand it shows other users that they can benefit in other ways from buying a product. On the other hand the users who have purchased products or services are more likely to recommend the company or the product to friends. This phenomenon is called viral marketing where clients market to potential clients. (Jablonski 2005, 116.)

## **6 PLATFORMS IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

The social media platforms that are relevant for this thesis project will be shortly described in this part and the presence of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. at the current stage will also be displayed. This gives an impression of what work has been done already and how the platforms are administered.

## 6.1 FACEBOOK

Facebook is the world-wide biggest social media network and for this thesis project also the most relevant. In the past years there has been a battle for the number one spot among users between Facebook and StudiVZ. StudiVZ is the German equivalent of Facebook, a platform that was originally founded to link students with each other. The struggle seems to be won by Facebook as platforms as the mentioned StudiVZ and MySpace are gradually losing relevance for users and by now every eighth German has a Facebook account of who about half are active on a daily basis. The Facebook owners stated that they want Facebook to become the new internet with possibilities to go shopping, credit card payments and more features that can make visits to other websites obsolete. (Bauhuber 2010.)

One example of this development is the community page that Facebook is pushing forward. Community pages are pages administered by Facebook which are filled with content from Wikipedia and other pages that are related to the topic. The community pages are often the first result to be found if a user is searching for a page on Facebook. (Li 2010.) According to Alexa.com, a website that audits the traffic of other websites, Facebook has the traffic rank two, after Google it is the most visited website in the internet. When having a look at the pages from which users are re-directed to Facebook, the top pages are Google with 7.37% of Facebook visitors being re-directed and YouTube with 4.79%. (Alexa.com 2010a.)

The page of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is simply called "Dortmund" making it easy for users to find this page. At this point the page has more than eleven thousands likes representing people who can receive messages from the page, though some of the users also block the news feed. The profile picture is large in order to make it stand out in the search results. It displays one of Dortmund's most popular buildings, the old brewery building of the Dortmunder Union brewery or shortly Dortmund's "U". The various tabs have links to the info page where all necessary information about DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is available creating full disclosure of who administers the page. Another tab has all the contact information. The events

section of the Dortmund page has information on city tours that are organized by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. More information on Dortmund and products of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can be found under the tab Dortmund, pdf-brochures which have the same content as the printed brochures are available for users. Also, the shopping- and restaurant-guide and the newsletter can be found. At last three tabs are links to media of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., a tab for photos and tabs for Flickr and YouTube. On Facebook the company clearly shows most activity and involvement.

DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. works together with Tourismus Zukunft an institute for e-tourism in Germany according to their own definition (Tourismus Zukunft 2010). Tourismus Zukunft focuses on the development of Facebook for tourism destinations in Germany. Therefore the Facebook presence of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is already well developed. Posts are done regularly every two or three days, plenty of media and information can be found from the different tabs of the page. The posts are written in a rather informal and short way that one would use in the company of friends. In difference are earlier posts where the language was very official and too much information was included in the posts. People in Dortmund are often considered blunt and very direct. With regard to the profile of fans of Dortmund on Facebook it can be seen that the majority of the fans has been living or is living in Dortmund so they can identify with the way of communication. Lastly, since a short while the administrators also have a weekly quiz on Fridays where a certain number of people who answer a question can win sponsored prizes, for example a box of beer or free tickets to clubs in Dortmund. (DORTMUNDtourismus 2010a.)

It is interesting to have a look at the age distribution in social network sites at this point.

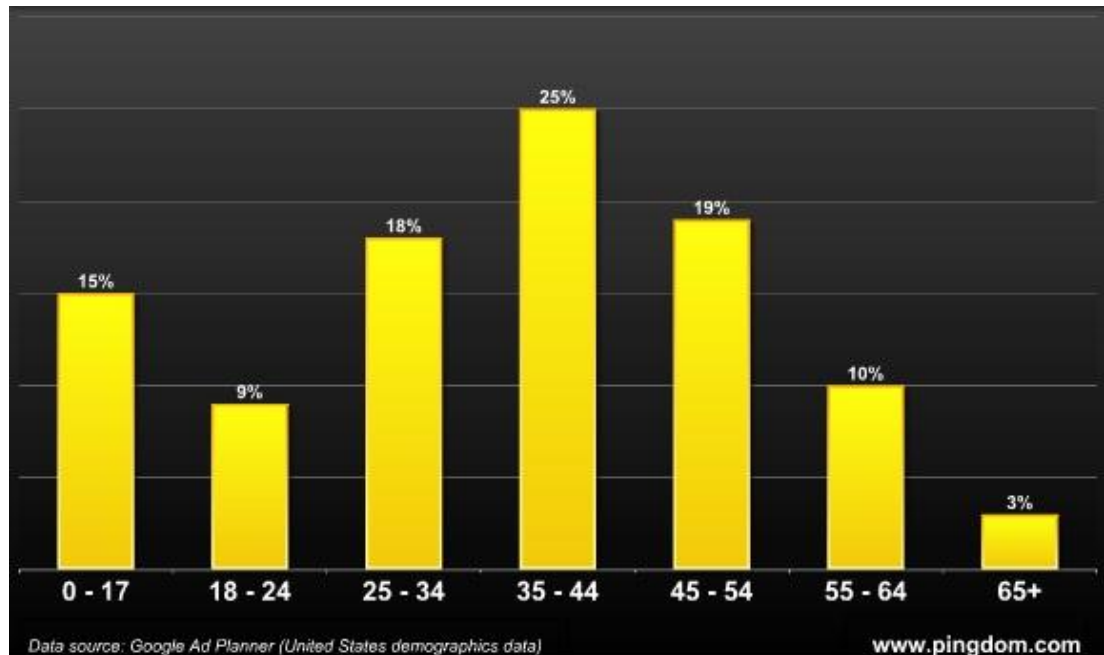


Figure2. Average age distribution across social network sites (Pingdom 2010.)

This graphic shows the average age distribution on social networking sites, including Facebook. The largest user groups are people between 35 and 44 years old and the second biggest groups are for people between 25 and 34 years old and 45 and 54 years old. Considering that the majority of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s clientele is likely to be 50 years or older it shows a certain dilemma in case of targeting the clientele. However, the children of the seniors who purchase DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s products are currently in the largest user groups. This means they are targets in the sense that they consider to buy the products of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. for their parents or grandparents. Furthermore, considering the future of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. this graphic shows that in 10 or 15 years the clientele will be very present on Facebook in case the users continue to use Facebook as a social networking site. If not, they might recall the positive image they have formed during their active time on Facebook that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. created. Thus, considering to purchase services from the company.



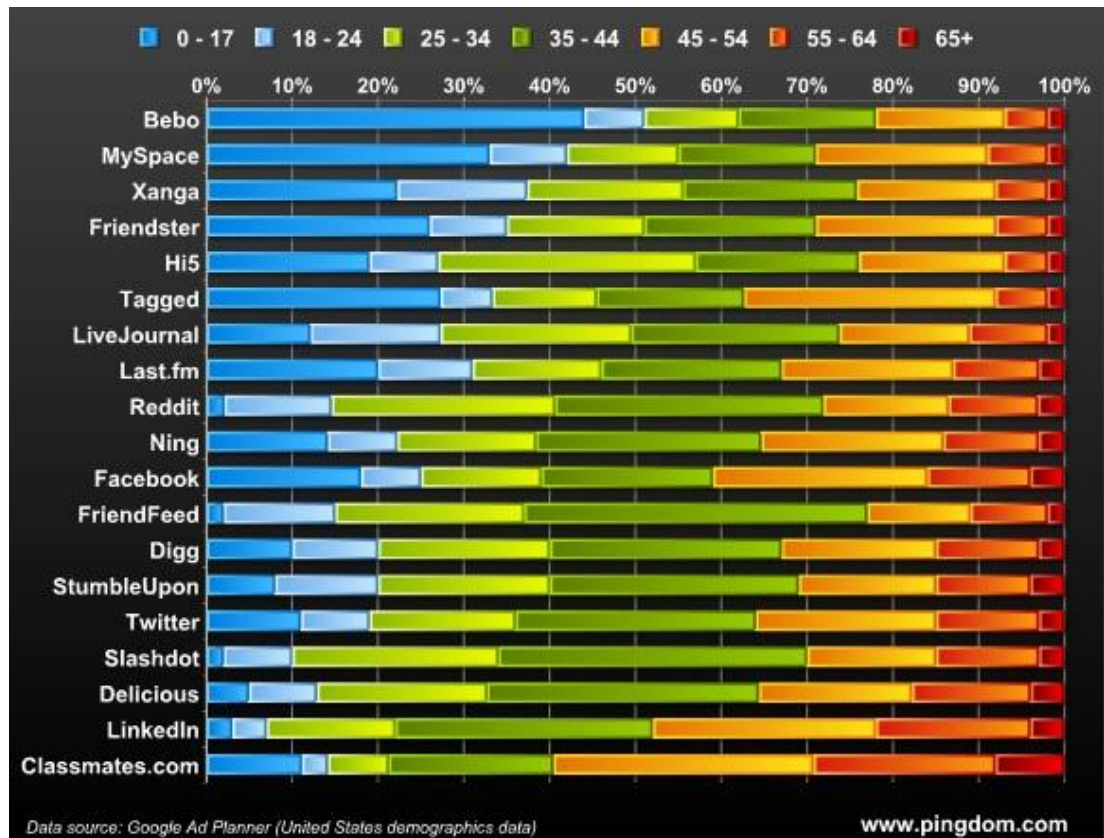


Figure 3. Age distribution on social network sites (Pingdom 2010.)

Complementary this table shows the age distribution on different social networking sites. This shows that in Facebook the age groups between 35 years and 54 years make up almost half of the users on Facebook, supporting the arguments given above. Especially the age group from 45 to 54 years is relatively big with about 25% of the users. The percentage of users between 35 and 44 years is about 20%.

## 6.2 YouTube

The second platform that will be described is YouTube. YouTube can also be considered a social media network, but the main purpose for YouTube is the sharing of content in form of videos. YouTube has a traffic rank of three according to Alexa.com and is right behind Google and Facebook showing the relevance of both of these platforms already at this stage as almost 25% of internet users visit YouTube daily. (Alexa.com 2010b.)

% of Unique Visits 	Upstream Site
12.47% 	facebook.com
9.61% 	google.com
3.13% 	yahoo.com
1.49% 	google.fr
1.44% 	wikipedia.org
1.13% 	live.com
1.00% 	twitter.com
0.92% 	google.co.uk
0.87% 	google.de
0.87% 	google.es

Table 1. Upstream sites – Which sites did users visit immediately preceding YouTube.com (Alexa.com 2010b.)

This graphic shows that most users are re-directed to YouTube via Facebook, 12,47%, and Google, 9,61% (Alexa.com 2010b). In difference to Facebook however YouTube is not as independent, because it was bought by Google for 1.65 billion U.S.-dollars in 2006 (Marshall 2006). Facebook and Google.com are clearly the most relevant sources of visitors to YouTube.

DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. also has a YouTube account that is called DORTMUNDtourismus. The company has 18 own video uploads (by 21 October 2010) showing mostly cultural features of Dortmund as a destination, some videos are related to the popular local football club BV Borussia Dortmund. The design of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s channel is simple with the colors of the city Dortmund red and white and the logo of the company. The channel has ten subscribers who are informed when DORTMUNDtourismus adds a new video. Apart from the subscribers there are twelve friends, who also receive updates about new content. The friend function makes it easier to share a video with other friends on YouTube. DORTMUNDtourismus itself subscribed to the channel of BV Borussia Dortmund "BVB", the channel of "DOredaktion" that posts videos about Dortmund, and to the channel "ruhr2010khs" that has videos about the

RUHR.2010, the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010 that Dortmund is part of (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., 2010d).

The activity on YouTube cannot be considered regular. New content is uploaded when it is acquired and subscriptions to other channels and subscriptions to the channel of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. are rare. A problem for the development of the YouTube account of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. is the creation or acquisition of video material that is good or interesting enough to use it for marketing Dortmund as a destination. This problem is mainly caused by a lack of resources and time. Employees are too involved in other tasks and responsibilities in order to create suitable material. Most of the videos have less than a hundred views, the exception are two videos about the partial opening of "Dortmund's U" and the celebration of football fans during a match of BV Borussia Dortmund (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., 2010d).

### **6.3 Flickr**

Flickr is also a social media network that allows users to upload and share pictures and videos with friends. However, the picture function outweighs the video function. Flickr is not as popular as YouTube and Facebook, but still ranks around 30th or 40th in the daily user visits analysis of Alexa.com. Considering the amount of websites available this is still a high rank. About 2% of all internet users visit Flickr on a daily basis. (Alexa.com 2010c.)

% of Unique Visits ?	Upstream Site
13.52%	google.com
10.84%	facebook.com
7.26%	yahoo.com
3.04%	twitter.com
1.99%	youtube.com
1.45%	google.co.uk
1.27%	google.de
1.06%	google.fr
0.98%	reddit.com
0.95%	tumblr.com

Table 2. Upstream sites – which sites did users visit immediately preceding flickr.com (Alexa.com 2010c.)

This graphic shows that most users find their way to Flickr via Google 13.52% and Facebook 10.84%. For Flickr yahoo.com (7.26%) and twitter.com (3.04%) are also relevant sources of visitors. However, for this thesis project they are irrelevant. (Alexa.com 2010c.)

DORTMUNDtourismus is also the name of the account that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. has on Flickr. The pictures uploaded are divided into twelve sets and five galleries that show facets of Dortmund as a destination. However, this account on Flickr is not very developed yet because DORTMUNDtourismus has only twelve contacts, similar to the friends on YouTube. Also on Flickr and YouTube DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. displays full disclosure and has the company information easily accessible for users. (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. 2010b.)

So far the activities on Flickr have been limited and the focus was set on filling the channel with media, because in early 2010 the account of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. had only slightly more than twenty pictures uploaded. The updates are not on a regular basis but occur when new media is collected either by employees of the company or partners working in Dortmund. The statistics regarding the pictures, the amount of times they have been viewed is low, only a few of the sets have more than ten views (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. 2010c). So if the platform is to be considered a

valuable asset in marketing Dortmund as a destination in the online social media, more development and effort is needed.

## **7 MARKETING SUGGESTIONS**

This part of the thesis project will discuss the ideas that were developed on the basis of theoretical information. Also my experience while completing the practical training for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. will have influence on the ideas and their development.

### **7.1 Communication**

Communication is the most important marketing tool for a company, especially in the online social media environment. As the focus of this thesis is on non-commercial marketing, communication has an even higher value. The aim is to exchange information and opinions with users of social media and to raise awareness of Dortmund as a destination and improve its image. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. presents the city of Dortmund on different social media channels, each of the channels requires a different form of presentation and communication, yet the message should remain the same throughout all channels. The recommendation is to develop a marketing communications plan for the relevant channels, in this case Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and the own website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. However, this would exceed the limits of this thesis project.

Part of the communications in the social media environment is repetitive communication that creates a reminder and learning effect among the recipients of messages. Considering the more emotional approach to communication in social media, this feature of communication can be linked with a form of story-telling. Big events could be lead to by starting a story already weeks or months beforehand. In the time before the event some information and facts could be added to remind the recipients of the message and add something more to their knowledge.

In Facebook this can be done very easily as different media are easy to combine in posting, so the textual information can be supported by pictures or videos that help to tell a story and appeal to the emotional receptors of users. But also in YouTube and Flickr there are good ways to convey a story.

As a platform that is mainly used for pictures, Flickr gives the possibility to create photo albums or sets that are dedicated to a story. Even though on YouTube no albums or sets can be created it is possible to collect videos dedicated to a certain topic. The relevant videos can be added to a playlist and are in that way bundled for other users to look at them and follow the storyline.

In order to develop a better image of Dortmund as a destination through communication it should be considered by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. to create a stronger brand image in the social media. On Flickr and YouTube it has been realized to a certain degree where the logo is used as the avatar for the company's accounts and the color-scheme of Dortmund dominates the layout of the account in YouTube. In Facebook only the information page gives an idea of who the company is. It is important to keep branding efforts in channels to a limit, but discreet involvement of the logo can be of benefit. The logo could be added to the pictures which are used for events that are organized by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Also, when the company uploads own media to the channels it would be beneficial if the media can be recognized as property of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. This could be achieved, for example, by watermarks in pictures or the logo and website at the end of a video.

These efforts can help the development of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. in several ways. It lets the users in social media identify the origin of the media and information that they are viewing and as disclosure is a must in social media it will not harm the company's image. In the long run a stronger brand presence will also create trust among users who are able to identify the company. Due to the communication and exchange of opinions and information in social media users may get a positive image of the company and trust its judgment and activities. Another means to increase the trust in the company is to refer to the co-operation with the German Tourism Board, DTV, and other public associations in the German tourism industry. Most importantly the commitment to quality standards is essential. It gives the users who see the information a positive impression and objective way to assess the activities of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.

A feature that is important for successful non-commercial marketing communication in social media is that no direct buying demand should be involved in the messages that are sent out to users. In social media users are critical and too aggressive marketing efforts can quickly lead to a negative impression. In regard to the multiplier effects in social media, this can lead to a strong drop in popularity and reputation. However, sometimes commercial messages can also be suitable, for example on holidays such as Mothers' Day, but also then the message should be subtle. Commitment is another requirement for success in social media marketing. It takes time to develop an own community or the presence in another community in the social media. Once it is developed well it also needs to be updated and maintained regularly. Especially in the case of YouTube and Flickr it is important to keep media updated. In Facebook news are easy to post in a short text form, but for Flickr and YouTube the company needs to produce new media.

Lastly, what is important on Flickr and YouTube is activity. In Facebook users often come by themselves out of interest or because of a connection with the city Dortmund. On Flickr and YouTube the circumstances are different. Even though DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. has been active on these platforms since November 2009 the numbers of views, friends and subscribers are low. Consequentially, it is vital to increase efforts in these two channels, not solely by posting new media regularly, but by actively participating in the communities. The point of social media is exchange of information, opinions and communication and for a SME like DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. this means they also have to actively address topics and contribute to discussions and content.

## **7.2 Benchmarking and other Facebook pages**

Benchmarking is an omnipresent idea in all business fields and company levels nowadays. The Benchmarking Exchange defines 'benchmarking [as] the process of measuring an organization's internal processes then identifying, understanding, and adapting outstanding practices from other organizations considered to be best-in-class' (The benchmarking exchange 2010). This means that a company looks at its own processes and activities



and compares them to the processes and activities of other companies which are considered to be innovative or otherwise superior to competitors. Nonetheless, good ideas can also be found when benchmarking in other fields of business and analyzing companies that are not outstanding. In social media marketing benchmarking can be considered a wider concept. The huge variety of communities and topics who use the same channel can give ideas about developing the own marketing efforts in social media.

For DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. the co-operation with Tourismus Zukunft is an important resource here, the employees of Tourismus Zukunft are considered experts in the so-called eTourism, the marketing of touristic enterprises online, and they also consult other companies in the industry. Consequentially, they have a large knowledge base to generate ideas from and can give useful information on where to benchmark for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. So the consultation of Tourismus Zukunft can indirectly show opportunities on how and where to benchmark efficiently.

Benchmarking in the context of this thesis serves the purpose to generate innovative marketing ideas. In social media benchmarking can be extended even to the international scale and the marketing means of companies all over the world can be observed and analyzed. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can use this criterion of social media to search for innovation and trends outside of Germany. Trends can be recognized and the importance of assessing and discovering trends is of great value to the image that a company builds in the social media environment and its marketing activities.

Benchmarking efforts can also cross the boundaries of the industry of a company, in this case the tourism industry. In social media are many private people who are not running a business, but have social media presentations that are relatively popular. In many cases they have good ideas that make their presentation more appealing or interesting for the users. Generally speaking, benchmarking in social media can cover best-in-industry examples, companies in different fields of business and the thousands of private users who want to share their opinions with other users. Good

examples for marketing and innovative ideas can be found while browsing through the internet.

As DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. markets Dortmund as a tourism destination they have knowledge on what visitors to Dortmund are looking for and what features of the city they appreciate. This allows the company to search the pages and channels of these features of the city in social media and analyze marketing methods of those organizations or companies. Their marketing is aimed on the people who are interested in that certain topic. Consequentially, their marketing ideas can also benefit the marketing efforts of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. because they can develop marketing activities that are aimed at that specific segment.

Finding pages that concern topics that visitors to Dortmund could be interested in also allows for another marketing means for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. The company can contribute to the Facebook page by posting relevant information which is linked to Dortmund on that page. When the local football club Borussia Dortmund is going to have a match that is interesting for spectators, DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. could post information on the Facebook page of Borussia Dortmund. These posts can include offers complementing a visit to Dortmund for a match and give information on traffic or accommodation. On Flickr and YouTube however it is more difficult to contribute content to the channel of another company, organization or interest group. On Flickr the company can comment on pictures of a relevant user and add one of their own pictures to re-direct to their own photo-stream or profile. Similar is the possibility on YouTube where video responses can be posted.

### **7.3 Suggestions related to the Facebook quiz**

Since 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010 DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. has a weekly quiz on the Facebook page. A question is posted on the wall, the starting page when a user comes to the profile of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. in Facebook, and the earliest correct answers win a prize. The prize was so far sponsored by businesses located in Dortmund, for example a brewery and a nightclub. (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., 2010a.) This idea is efficient in generating

traffic on the Facebook page and creating a positive impression by giving prizes to users. Though it can be argued that in the long run conducting the quiz once a week can be too excessive. In future it may show that it is difficult to find a new sponsored prize every week and when the quiz is conducted in such a high frequency the users might tire of it and it loses its effect.

A solution could be to have the quiz once a month in order to keep the users excited and raise participation numbers. A traffic analysis on the Facebook page could show when the visitor numbers are highest in order to get most people to visit the page or when the traffic is rather low in order to raise the visitor numbers. Depending on the prize that will be given the day of the quiz could also be changed. Giving out free tickets to a night club of course is most interesting shortly before a weekend other prizes might be more interesting at another point of the week. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. could conduct the quiz on a Monday or Tuesday and award for example a free cup of coffee in a café for users who have just returned to work after the weekend.

Furthermore, it can be argued that adding a live element, such as pod-casts, increases the effect that marketing efforts have on targets. If the quiz was arranged during a busy time when many users are on Facebook it could be carried out as a live quiz with a build up to it in the form of posts that announce a countdown to the quiz. Consequentially, more users would actively visit the Facebook page of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. and would be more attentive to other posts on the page which may include relevant or interesting content for the users. Additionally, while waiting for the quiz to start, the users might browse the other tabs on the Facebook page and find out more information about Dortmund. Finally, a live quiz could raise the level of joy and excitement for participants and support the positive emotions and impressions they get of Dortmund.

The prizes for the quiz were so far sponsored by other companies that in turn get promotion on the Facebook page of Dortmund. However, the companies did not help DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. to promote Dortmund and its Facebook page. One day or some hours before the quiz actually starts the

sponsoring companies could announce on their own Facebook pages that on the page of Dortmund there will be a quiz where users can win a product of the company. Thereby equilibrium is achieved in regard of co-operational marketing where companies combine resources to attain a common promotion means. To participate the quiz the users would have to add the page of Dortmund to their pages of interests. Even if after the quiz they dislike the page of Dortmund again, the multiplier effect comes into effect, the contacts of the user, who joined the quiz and has the news on his or her page, can all see the news and thus the reach of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. and its message on Facebook may expand. This idea is also in line with the research of pages that are of interest for Dortmund to post information on as it was explained earlier.

So far the quiz only helps to generate traffic on the Facebook page of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. and the question is if and how the quiz could also contribute to the traffic on the other platforms such as Flickr. Because the quiz was initiated on Facebook it might be the best solution to recognize Facebook also as the starting point for quizzes on other platforms. The quiz can be extended to a picture quiz where users see a small part of an object and have to guess what it is. This had already been realized earlier in 2010. A Facebook post involved a picture of an element of a new object in Dortmund and the response was very good, so it was shown the idea is worth realization.

The possibility to extend it to Flickr would be that the picture used for the quiz is hosted on Flickr so that the users visit the Flickr account of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. to participate in the quiz. At this point it merely generates some traffic to the Flickr page, but to improve the idea an album on Flickr could be created that contains all the pictures used for quizzes. After the quiz was completed and the winners awarded the comment function could be disabled and all comments deleted so that people who did not participate in the quiz can still guess what the pictures display. When posting a new quiz a reference to the gallery can be made to get more traffic to the Flickr account which then can help to expand the Flickr account, get more friends and visitors on that platform.

Realizing the quiz on YouTube and the own website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. might not be worth the effort. Activity on YouTube is always linked with creating a video which costs much time and effort to produce in a suitable way. In case a suitable video can be acquired in a rather easy fashion the quiz could be expanded to YouTube just as it was suggested for spreading the quiz to Flickr. Also an expansion to the own website does not appear to be reasonable as three different platforms are already available and a quiz on the website would require alterations to the website and might damage the image of a well-structured and informative website.

#### **7.4 Cross-media marketing**

Cross-media marketing can support the marketing of the online environment also in the offline environment. The Free Dictionary defines cross-media marketing as 'advertising in all media including radio, TV, direct mail, magazines, newspapers and the Web' (The free dictionary 2010). The definition talks about all media channels that can be used for advertising. For the purpose of this thesis the focus will be on marketing the online environment also in the offline environment, mainly in printed media. Distributing information about all online channels that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. uses to communicate with internet users would be redundant. So a selection of what platforms are most important for the marketing of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. in the online environment would be useful, these can certainly be defined as the company's own website [www.dortmund-tourismus.de](http://www.dortmund-tourismus.de) as well as the Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/dortmund.info>.

The internet is becoming an increasingly important medium for a company to communicate with customers or possible customers. Enabling internet users to easily give feedback in the online environment is of high value for companies. Cross-media marketing allows clients and people interested in visiting Dortmund to find their way to the online presences of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. where they can get into contact with the company. Hence, the people have better means to contribute to the

development of the company and its products as they also have real experience with the company in difference to the users in social media.

The idea and realization of cross-media marketing is simple as it is a discreet approach to embracing the online environment also offline. Including information about online channels on printed material can have a strong impact. Visitors of the tourist information or the InfoMobil, a caravan of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. that visits different cities throughout the year and distributes information, take home printed information material. Printed information about the Facebook page on the materials can already lead them to become a part of the Facebook community of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. A problem that may occur is the clientele of Dortmund who are mostly senior citizens over 50 years old and in many cases not active in social media. Apart from free brochures and other free information that is distributed by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. it might also be beneficial to print the information on the tickets for the sightseeing tours organized by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. In some cases the children of seniors buy tickets as gifts for their parents and if those see the information about the online channels printed they might go there to seek more information or a possibility to get into contact.

I have also noticed during my practical training that many young people who visit Dortmund for a day or two, visit the tourist information and these are interesting targets for the marketing in Facebook. These and other visitors ask for printed plans of the city center so including the information about Facebook and the website could be of high value. As the channels in social media should be interlinked they will hopefully also be redirected to the Flickr or YouTube account of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.

## **7.5 User reporters**

People are likely to be influenced in their opinions and behaviors when they see other people on their level test or use a product (Von der Oelsnitz-Fritz 2006, 73-77). They learn about the experiences that are connected to a product. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can make use of this phenomenon and invite one user or several users to test a product of the company and report

about it later on in the social media channels of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. However, the choice should not be any user, but rather users who have been active on one of the social media platforms and have contributed pictures or videos. This shows that they are more willing than other users to actually share their media, experiences and opinions. A suggestion at this point would be the Facebook user “Stephan Tscherny” who often participates in discussions and adds pictures to the Facebook page of Dortmund. Additionally, he appears to be a person who polarizes strongly and therefore an experience report by a user like him could spawn lively discussions. When the users are invited to test a product they should be informed about the purpose of the invitation and an outline of how they are asked to document.

The idea is that the users who were invited test a product like a sightseeing tour. While on the tour they take pictures or videos that document the places and events which are seen during the tour from the perspective of the customer. Afterwards, the users write a short report about their experiences during the tour whether it is positive or negative. The report and media will then be uploaded to the various social media platforms, pictures to Flickr, videos to YouTube and the text in combination with some of the media to Facebook. Uploading the media and report separately will support the idea of interlinking the channels and letting them depend on each other in order to re-distribute the traffic to all of them.

Other users can identify with the experiences of the users that tested the products and form an image of the products that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. offers. This also contributes to the image that users get of Dortmund and DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. The aim is to get users more actively involved with the company, its products and that they discuss with each other and the users who reported on the product in the social media. Apart from engagement this also creates an exchange of opinions and information that can contribute to the knowledge base of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. in regard to feedback on the products and preferences of users. Such an activity could make Dortmund as a destination and DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. as its marketing organization more accessible to users in social media. Presumably, many users who join the communities of Dortmund do not

actually see Dortmund as a tourism destination and this activity promotes the image of Dortmund as a desirable destination.

Depending on the success in case this idea is implemented it might prove beneficial to repeat it and invite different users to try the products. However, if a first time the users respond well to the user that reports on the product, that person could also be invited again. Upper Austria has a project that is similar. The Tourism Association of Upper Austria casted a lady from the users on their Facebook page to travel through Upper Austria and report on various events and activities in Upper Austria. (Oberösterreich Tourismus 2010.) However, the reporter does not change and in the long run the users can tire of the same reporter. Inviting new users also gives other users who are interested in the chance to voice their opinion a possibility to do so. Furthermore, it would be very beneficial if the invited user is administering his or her own social media platform where he or she shares the experience with the own social network. Nonetheless, it takes much time and monitoring effort to define which users are suitable to be invited.

## **7.6 User generated content**

User generated content is a core idea of social media and helps companies to collect useful information and media concerning the interests of users. An essential problem is to motivate users to contribute media, especially because only a small percentage of users actively add or adjust content in a community. For collecting user generated content it can be useful to reactivate the discussion forums in Facebook even though the company had dispatched of those before, because they were not used. The key to achieve active use of the discussions forums is to motivate and involve the users on Facebook. A clever choice of topics may help to get users to use the discussion forums and share information and media in the forums from which DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can benefit. News that is posted on the wall of Dortmund's Facebook page that is relevant to a discussion could indicate the discussion forum so that users visit the forum.

Moreover, the users should be motivated not only to write, but also to upload and share their media in the forums. Preferably these media could be posted



as creative commons so that DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can use the media also for its own purposes according to the creative common license conditions the owner of the media set. 'Creative Commons is a nonprofit organization that increases sharing and improves collaboration' by allowing users to adopt media of others for their own purposes with different license agreements (Creative Commons 2010). Otherwise permission could be asked directly from the user to use the media for certain purposes.

Also, the texts that are posted in forums can be regarded as a valuable resource, because texts usually contain precise and the most information for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. The topics the forums deal with can be deduced from the company's knowledge about users in Facebook, for example beer and the local football club Borussia Dortmund are usually topics that cause numerous reactions. Because the topics are relevant to users the information gained from the discussions can help to develop the marketing and collect more information for the database of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. So it can be of great benefit to start discussions that are of interest for both parties in social media, DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. and the users on their Facebook page.

Apart from collecting information from the discussions and media posted DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. can use the discussions to distribute their own information and media to the Facebook users. If the media is distributed as a creative common the users can feel free to use pictures and videos also for other purposes. In case the originator of the media, in this case DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., can be recognized from the media it is a great way to spread the reach and support the brand awareness of Dortmund as a destination.

During my training period for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., together with another trainee, I planned a photo-competition with the aim to let users engage with the company, contribute to the awareness of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. on Flickr and form a collection of creative pictures related to the topic of the photo-competition. The photo-competition is set around the re-opening of the "Dortmunder U" which is a well-known

sight of the city, a big “U” on top of an old brewery building. The name of the competition is “U-moments” and the participants are asked to upload pictures to the Flickr account of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. that show a moment that is funny, creative or in any other way appealing to the eye and mind and includes the letter “U” somewhere in the picture. The prizes for the competition are of high value. The first prize is a weekend with two overnights plus dinner in a four-star hotel in Dortmund combined with two tickets for a Borussia Dortmund match and a ticket for the regional public transportation. So the incentive to participate is appealing to users.

### **7.7 Facebook user tour**

Another idea to creatively involve the opinions and knowledge of the users on Facebook could be a Facebook User Tour, a sightseeing tour in Dortmund created by users on Dortmund’s Facebook page. The basis for developing this idea is also a thread in the discussion forum on Facebook. The users are motivated to give ideas and opinions on what they think would be worth visiting in Dortmund. The idea is not to develop a serious and logical tour plan, but that users create a tour which visits unusual places and is humorous and fun to attend. Apart from mentioning locations that users consider interesting they are also encouraged to include anecdotes and stories that they know about places which can then be told by the guide during the tour. Also any other wishes of customers can be considered for this tour as long as they are appropriate and legal. On the basis of the ideas collected from users the company can design a tour that combines the ideas in a feasible way with a script which includes the stories the users in Facebook have experienced at the selected locations.

After the tour has been developed and is at the point that it can be realized, a lottery can be held among the users who contributed to the development of the tour. Similar to the weekly quiz DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. could make a live draw of the winners who can participate, if technically feasible. Otherwise a video could be recorded that shows the draw in order to prove the authenticity of it and raise the excitement for users. After the video has been published DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. could wait for three or four days to

publish the written list of participants so every viewer of the participants can have a chance to see the draw before the results are published.

In order to emphasize the commitment to social media and the source of the tour, the tour could simply be called the “Facebook user tour”. Additionally, this gives the participants the possibility to identify themselves with the product they have created themselves. After the tour an after party could be held in a popular bar in Dortmund where all the participants of the development of the tour are invited to celebrate together. They get a chance to get to know each other in person, similar to twitter meetings where twitter users meet for lunch (Twittagessen 2010). An after party also gives the chance of sponsorship for the tour by a bar or a brand of a drink, suitable venues and sponsoring should be decided considering on the success and size of the tour. Lest the tour is a success it could become a product that is available twice a year and is adjusted every year according to the wishes of the users. The pictures and videos of the tour get posted in the various social media channels for users to reminisce and learn about the tour.

### **7.8 Internal information forum**

User generated content can help a company to develop, however, the idea of user generated content can also be transferred to the internal environment of a company. During my practical training for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. I sometimes noticed that employees while talking on the phone with clients had to search information or ask other employees about information that was relevant for the client. Accordingly, it could help the processes in the company a lot if there was a central information source on all topics that are important. A solution that involves the principles of user generated content would be an internal information forum. All employees are registered in the forum and can post new information according to their main field of operations. The guides who work as freelancers should have limited access to the forum so they can post information about events that occurred during sightseeing tours.

This way the employees can constantly access information and do not rely on responses of colleagues who might be in a meeting, busy or on holiday.

Consequentially, they can always find the information that a customer needs. Similar to the idea of Wikipedia this forum is an internal social medium that relies on the content created by its users. But just like the social media platforms in the internet a forum of that kind would also need strong commitment. Employees should be encouraged to post information when they receive it. At the same time information that has been outdated should also be removed by employees who posted it in order to keep the forum organized.

Another problem is the acquisition of such a forum and its price. The internet offers various free forum services such as <http://www.freeforums.org> that refer to themselves as the number one forum host in the online environment and also promises high security (FreeForums.org 2010). Security would be a major concern. Even though the service offers high security the forum would contain information that is classified and should only be accessed by the employees of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. An option would be to ask Raphael GmbH, the company who designed and maintains the new website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. for an offer on how much the creation of such a forum would cost and if it is in their service spectrum. It is likely that Raphael GmbH can run the forum on their servers and therefore create a higher level of security that allows DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. to post also classified information.

### **7.9 Tag editing based on keyword and popularity analysis**

While looking at the different social media channels of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. it could be seen that some topics spawn much more interest than others. The videos on DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s YouTube channel related to the football club Borussia Dortmund (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., 2010e) and the "Dortmunder U" opening (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., 2010f) have by far more views than media related to other topics. The same is the case on Flickr. At this point it can be very useful for DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. to make two different analyses. One analysis that determines which topics spawn the most interest among users and another that creates an overview over the use of tags in the different media channels. Tags are used to 'extend the reference labels,

associations and search keywords by which any type of content can be found' (Good 2008).

These analyses can support DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. in terms of selecting media and information posted in the social media channels to generate more awareness and interaction on their social media platforms. In turn it can lead to more visits to the website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. Editing the tags according to the analysis will make the media more accessible for users who have interest in the topics. Subsequently, the users who find the media will also find their way to the channel of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. However, the focus of information distribution should not switch to only the few topics that generate most interest. Posts of these fields of interest are mainly aimed at creating more traffic and activating users in terms of communication and contribution. At this point I can already say that the choice of tags of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.'s YouTube channel are poor as the videos have only few tags and some are rather unlikely to be searched by users such as 'Eröffnung 28.05.2010' (DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., 2010f).

After the analyses the media on the different channels, mainly YouTube and Flickr, could be sorted in a way that makes the channel more appealing. Firstly, each of the topics should get their own gallery on Flickr and an own playlist on YouTube. Creating playlists on YouTube is generally beneficial, it allows users to watch videos of the same topic in sequence, playlists can be embedded as such on different platforms apart from YouTube. The playlists are also relevant to the search function on YouTube and are listed separately in the search results (Chitu 2008). Secondly, efforts should be made to keep the most interesting media visible on the first view of the YouTube or Flickr channel. Both channels display the latest uploaded media highest, so in order to keep the interesting topics at the top of the list new media according to those should be added.

Earlier the re-activation of the Facebook discussion forums was mentioned and the discussion forums according to the most interesting topics could appeal to Facebook users. The users browse those discussions, but might also view other discussions that are in the forums and might be of interest to

them as well. The choice of the topics for the discussions that are started by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. should also be based on the analysis of tags that are most relevant to users. Furthermore, the tag analysis could impact the search engine optimization of the official website of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V., however that is a topic that will not be dealt with in this thesis project. Last, it should be considered to use only Flickr as a platform for pictures created by DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. in order to direct more traffic to the Flickr account. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. already uses one of the tabs in Facebook for the Flickr account. Facebook could then become the platform used only for the picture uploads of other users.

### **7.10 Charity**

Charity efforts of companies or organization help to create a positive image of the company, in the online and offline environment, and contribute to the general welfare of a region or nation. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. could also join a charity program that is related to Dortmund such as Roter Keil or Kinderlachen that have already co-operated with Borussia Dortmund, the local football club (Borussia Dortmund 2010a; Borussia Dortmund 2010b). It needs to be said that this idea can be considered ethically incorrect, however the point is not to exploit charity for the purposes of the company, but to let all participants benefit of the efforts that are suggested.

The idea comes from a YouTube channel that was discovered in my leisure time. The owner of the channel who calls himself HuskyStarcraft and dedicates his YouTube channel to a computer game called Starcraft displayed the following idea. The videos are mostly commentaries on the game, but as he became more popular in the community of the game and on YouTube he came up with the idea of charity. In northern America is a charity organization that collects toys, games, books and money for sick children. The organization is called 'Child's Play' and is based on the community of online games in northern America. (Childsplay Charity 2010.) HuskyStarcraft decided to appeal to his viewers to donate for the organization and offered various incentives if individuals donated a certain amount. Finally, if the donations reached a certain amount all together he decided to let his viewers decide what kind of a haircut he should get. (HuskyStarcraft, 2010a.) In the

end the donations reached several hundred U.S. dollars and HuskyStarcraft got a haircut while documenting everything via his YouTube channel calling the whole process “Humiliate Husky to help humanity” adding a comical element to the idea. (HuskyStarcraft 2010b.) So the idea is to contribute to charity, create a positive image of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. and let all users who donate benefit.

The co-operation with a charity organization that is established would have certain benefits. The organizations are already known by people and have a well-organized structure and they can probably help DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. with the collection of donations. Additionally, it shows the users of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V.’s channels that the money will also reach the right organization. The best channel for this concept would be Facebook, because it has the highest user numbers of all channels.

In general the idea is similar to the example of HuskyStarcraft. The users can donate money and get an incentive for it, but there is no person for the users to identify with on the Facebook channel so the incentive cannot be related to a certain person. Subsequently, DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. needs a different incentive to achieve a higher amount of donations. One opportunity would be to organize a party or event and a donation of certain level, for example five Euros, would grant the donator free entrance to the event. In case of a party the idea could be realized together with a night club in Dortmund whose owners would be interested in supporting DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. A party that donators get free entrance to would also support the social media channel on Facebook of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. by bringing together the users of the channel creating a stronger identification. The users who have donated most could be honored officially at the party to add another incentive in order to raise the amount of donations. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. and partners should donate as well and the revenue of the event should also go to charity.

However, DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. could also follow the example of HuskyStarcraft and let users who donate give ideas on what could be done as an event or activity if a certain amount of donations is reached.

HuskyStarcraft allowed users to suggest a hairstyle he should get when donating a certain amount. DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. should do it the same way and let users who donated a certain amount give suggestions on the closing event in a discussion forum on Facebook. When the donation process is over the employees of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. could select the ideas that are most attractive and feasible and open a poll on their website to find out which event the users favor, thus creating traffic on the website. Apart from DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. also the organizations that help with this concept could benefit from the rising traffic as they are also present in Facebook and could probably appeal more users to their pages and thus raise awareness of their cause.

Lastly, if needed, DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. could develop a catchy name for the concept to attract attention and allow users to recognize it quickly. HuskyStarcraft called his project "Humiliate Husky to help humanity" which is somewhat humorous and uses an alliteration as a simple linguistic means to draw attention, but also puts the focus of the project in the name.



## 8 CONCLUSIONS

In the process of the thesis project it became clear that marketing in the online social media is a very complex but rich field. The marketing parts showed the extent of online marketing in social media and the theoretical knowledge is just an outline of all the information that can be found about the topic. Online social media are in a constant phase of change and theoretical knowledge on the field is often outdated again as soon as it is available to the public.

However, the theoretical research for this topic showed that there are many factors that influence the success. The interaction and interdependency of some factors make the marketing in online social media a delicate operation. The theory also showed that, on the one hand, in many cases companies do not realize basic marketing ideas and concepts that lay the foundation for successfully expanding marketing to different media. On the other hand it gives much room for improvement for companies that are easily realized and efficient.

The online social media environment is a very special environment for marketing. During the process of the thesis project many changes took place, the company DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. introduced new features in their social media appearances, added plenty of media and developed in different ways. Therefore some of the ideas mentioned here might have lost relevance already after a short period of time. Keeping that in mind the progress of DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. in social media was monitored daily in order to keep up with all changes that took place.

What stands out is that marketing in the online social media is challenging, because the line between communicating a marketing message and advertising is very thin. This is because of the characteristics of the users in social media who are critical and determined when companies push their message too strongly on them. Consequentially, for a company it is essential to know how far they can convey a marketing message without offending the users of the platforms and to what extent using social media for marketing is

ethically acceptable. At the same time social media offer a plentitude of marketing possibilities and companies need to find the equilibrium between all the opportunities and realize them in a reasonable fashion. A recommendation that could be discovered is the long-term commitment to the social media platforms that a company operates on. Over a long period of time many different ideas can be realized, however this also means that a company should focus their marketing efforts in online social media to only several platforms. Thereby it is more easily to control the marketing message and transmit it uniformly on all channels.

Also, as communication is one of the most important aspects of marketing, companies need to be active in the social media and get into an exchange of information and opinions with their users. For a company like DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. that has strong limits in regard to the resources in marketing, it becomes more important to focus on a few channels, because the personnel available cannot deal with too many channels all at once. Limiting to certain channels allows the company to commit more intensely to those in order to ensure continuity and ongoing progress to the marketing efforts in the online social media.

For the thesis project it can be said that the goals that were set out in the beginning could be achieved. The theoretical research has already shown various approaches to improving the marketing efforts and therefore formed a good basis for developing ideas in order to raise traffic on the social media platforms. The ideas range from changes in the basic approaches of marketing to social media marketing, but also ideas that could be developed by actively looking at social media platforms and channels of other companies and private people. There is a balance of development and innovative ideas that can help DORTMUNDtourismus e.V. to raise awareness for Dortmund in social media.

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