User-Oriented Appropriateness

A Theoretical Model of Written Text on Facebook for Improved PR Communication

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Abstract

During the last decade, social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook have become normal tools for our daily communication. The rise and usage of these networks not only affected how we stay up to date, but their usage as tools for our daily conversations also affected the way we communicate online – including the ability to build friendly conversations and interpret each other's messages.

The media industry, on the other hand, has discovered the powerful advantages of Facebook and is using it to communicate directly with their target groups. But, this online communication is different. PR people who have grown up using traditional media often struggle with this new, digital world and its unfamiliar techniques and language (Morris & Goldsworthy, 2012). An increasing number of users, on the other hand, do not struggle and might expect a different form of communication to interpret PR messages the right way.

While some research is available regarding public relations in an online world (e.g., Wright & Hinson, 2009; McCorkindale, 2010) and on computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Walther, 1992; Draft & Lengel, 1984; Rice, 1987) little empirical evidence has been offered on the impact CMC has on the usage of language and communication within the field of online PR specifically – and its interpretation by customers. As PR is concerned with communication and, according to CMC, the Internet influences the way we communicate and interpret communication, there is a clear need for research that investigates what affects clients' interpretation of text-based public relations communication practices on Facebook. Employing a qualitative grounded theory approach and semi-structured in-depth interviews with users of Facebook, this thesis presents the development of the new theory of user-oriented appropriateness, which explains the process of what affects the users interpretation of PR driven Facebook posts and of how to communicate appropriate on the SNS.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The rise of the Internet and its new communication technologies have influenced many parts of our daily life, including the way we use these new technologies to stay in touch and communicate with each other (Fuchs, 2014; Baym, 2010; Shklovski, Kraut & Cummings, 2008; Shkolvski, 2004; Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). Especially social media tools and social networking sites (SNS) have become normal parts of our daily communication. Today we use sites such as Facebook and Twitter to share our thoughts, feelings and opinions, to chat about our day or to stay informed about what is happening in the lifes of our friends.

Of all social networkings sites available, Facebook has become the most popular one. In August 2015, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that the SNS has reached a new all-time high: "For the first time ever, one billion people used Facebook in a single day. On Monday, [24 August, 2015] 1 in 7 people on Earth used Facebook to connect with their friends and family." (2015). However, not all of those people were using Facebook in a private matter. A remarkable number of those use social networks to fulfill organisational goals because both companies and the media industry have also discovered the advantages of Facebook. As a result, public relations (PR) departments and officers now use SNS to spread their messages and connect directly with their customers (Lipschultz, 2015; Fawkes, 2012). Thus, while scrolling through their Facebook News Feeds[1], private users see a mix of private and corporate posts.

1 The **Facebook News Feed** is the "the constantly updating list of stories" (Facebook, 2015a) on the user's Facebook home page. Filtered and structured by an algorithm, it aims to give the user a the most important or interessting posts and stories. (Facebook, 2015b)

1.2. Research Context

The impact of social media is seen as the biggest impact on public relations in its long history (Heather, 2012; Morris & Goldsworthy, 2012) and has changed how PR officers are spreading their messages (Supa; 2014; Wright & Hinson, 2009). After decades of focussing on journalists as their most important target group, the "emphasis is now moving from press releases and traditional media relations to "sharable online content" with a relatively new interest in the direct reach of a message" (Lipschultz, 2015, p. 69) that has put the customers in the focus of public relations.

According to McCorkindale (2010), this important transformation of public relations has resulted in the fact that research around the impact of social media has become a popular area in the field of public relations. Wright and Hinson (2008, 2009, 2010, 2015), for example, examined how social media tools are changing public relations and how these new communication technologies are actually used by PR officers. Shen and Fussel Sisco (2015) also focussed on the general usage of social media tools by PR professionals, but concentrated more on its changing influence on the professionals themselves. Evans, Twomey and Scott Talan (2011), on the other hand, explored Twitter as a tool for public relations and found that PR practitioner see the microblogging platform as a valuable asset. And yet in another study, McCorkindale (2010) focussed on Facebook and analysed organisational fanpages to determine what content the corporations are sharing within the SNS – with the result that PR officers were not "utilizing this medium to its fullest extend" (Ibid, p. 11). Thus, a lot of emphasis has been put on the impact of social media on public relations and its usage within PR.

However, one topic that is repeatedly addressed in several studies and by several scholars (Supa, 2014; Morris & Goldsworthy, 2012; Evans, Twomey & Scott Talan, 2011; Coombs & Holladay, 2007) is that this new, direct communication within SNS needs a new tone and style. Although, the comments about this new language are at least vague: While Morris and Goldsworthy (2012) advice that PR professionals should use “the language of the social media” (p. 152), Evans, Twomey and Talan (2010, p. 10) state that “companies that use a language or a tone that is too corporate come across as fake”. Yet, in a study on corporate blogs, Puschmann (2010, p. 125) summarises that organisations should adopt the digital situation, knowing that language should adjust “to the situation it is used in”.

While there is no further recommendation about what language, tone and style PR professionals should use to address their clients within SNS such as Facebook, scholars in the field of online linguistic and computer-mediated communication (CMC) have put a lot of emphasis in exploring how the Internet has changed and influenced our human communication (Crystal, 2011; Baym, 2010; Baron, 2008; Shklovski, Kraut & Cummings, 2008; Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004; Herring, 1996; Walther, 1992; Draft & Lengel, 1984).

Although text-based communication is generally seen as the most complicated form of communication (Reichertz, 2010) and it requires both, a shared meaning and understanding of the written words (Fawkey, 2012) and some level of experience in interpreting the text within a certain media (Rusch, 1994; Henning & Huth, 1975), scholars (Crystal, 2011; Baym, 2010; Baron, 2008) have shown that the users of the twenty-first century have gained this experience and learned how to communicate with each other on the Internet.

In studies that focussed on the role of emotions and emoticons in CMC, Derks, Bos & Grumbkow (2008, 2007) found that emoticons are one helpful tool to simplify online communication. Because of their ability to mark feelings, for example sarcasm or happiness, they have enriched CMC – and became a standard tool that is now well accepted and used among the Internet (van Dijk, 2012; Baym, 2010).
In addition, users have started to use a different, easier language on the Internet. Elements of oral conversations like “ooops”, “yeah” and “ugh” have found their way into the user’s online vocabulary, a vocabulary that is filled by words that are closer to the ones we use in an informal oral conversation (Baron, 2008). While Lipschultz (2015) is referring to a written online language that is used in a way it is normally used in a private face-to-face conversation, Crystal (2001, 2010) and Baym (2010) are speaking of a mixed modality that combines elements of written and oral language: a language that is typed into a keyboard and written down on the one hand, but that rather sounds like an easy, conversational, spoken language on the other hand.

Summarized, online communication technologies such as Facebook have not only changed the way humans communicate with each other, the users of these online technologies also gained experience in how to built rich conversations within these tools – and started to create a new hybrid form of language that is close to our casual, oral language and easy to interpret. However, the question still is what this change of language means for PR professionals who are using Facebok for their organisational communication. What language does the user expect them to use?

1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

Following the aforementioned development, there is a clear need for research that focuses on the language and investigates what using "the language of the social media" (Morris & Goldsworthy, 2012), a language that is not too corporate (Evans, Twomey & Talan, 2010), means for PR communication within Facebooks SNS.

Thus, the overall aim of this dissertation study is to focus on the language expectations of Facebook users' and explore how they want to be addressed by public relations communications within the social network. Because little empirical evidence has been offered on the impact CMC has on the usage and interpretation of language within the field of digital PR, a qualitative grounded theory methodology (GTM) was chosen for this project – because of GTM's strength in generating a theoretical understanding in an area "where little is already known" (Goulding, 1998).

Therefore, the objective is to develop a theoretical understanding of what characteristics affect the user's interpretation and judgement whether a PR professional has used the right language and phraseology on Facebook. The two research questions that guided this study are as follows:

RQ1: How do users of Facebook who engage with PR communications want to be 'spoken to' within the SNS?

RQ2: What affects the interpretation and understanding of the users while interpreting the text of a PR-driven post on Facebook?

This process culminated in the development of a theory of user-oriented appropriateness, which is shown in figure 4.1. on page 102.

1.4. Organisation of the Thesis

This section provides the reader with an overview of the organisation of the dissertation, which is subdivided into five chapters and an appendix section. While this overview is placed at the end of the first chapter, it will start with chapter two.

Chapter 2 provides the reader with a comprehensive review of the literature. After a brief discussion on what public relations is and how the rise of social media and especially social networking sites have changed PR, the field of digital public relations will be introduced. Public relations is argued to be fundamentally concerned with communication, that is why the chapter reviews in detail some core concepts of human communication with a special focus on the interpretation of text-based communication. After that, key concepts and characteristics of computer-mediated are presented before the literature review concludes with a discussion of language practice in an online environment.

Chapter 3 describes the research process and the overall research design of this study. It begins with a critical discussion on positivism and interpretivism, whereby interpretivism is chosen as the worldview underlaying this dissertation project. The chapter then proceeds with an introduction to the chosen research methodology, which is Strauss' (1990) version of grounded theory methodology, before it presents qualitative, semi-structured interviews as the primary form of data collection and discusses the selection of participants. Subsequently, the step-by-step process of data analysis and the building of theory will be explained before the chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical issues.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the results of the research project. Organised by the main categories that were identified as the core elements of the emergent theory of user-oriented appropriateness, the chapter provides the reader with a detailed presentation on how the data of the 15 interviews have been analysed and how this analysis has lead to the development of the final theory. In addition, it critically discusses how the user's desire of appropriate communication connects to previous research on public relations and CMC and what these findings mean for PR professionals. After this detailed presentation of the single elements, the emergent theory of user-oriented appropriateness will be introduced and summarised in its entirety.

Chapter 5 then focuses on presenting and discussing the meaning of this research project in its entirety. It starts with concluding thoughts and a final discussion on the developed theory of user-oriented appropriateness itself and goes on with summarising the findings briefly to answer the research questions and illuminate the dissertations contribution to knowledge.
After that, limitations of the findings and the research process itself will be discussed before recommendations for further research will be presented. At the end of this chapter, the thesis will be summarised and concluded.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss and present previous research and findings in the field of public relations and online communication. After a brief discussion about what PR is and what it does, the first part of the literature review focuses on the rise of the Internet and social networking sites and their influence on public relations. It will present the term 'digital public relations' and discuss how this digital PR has changed the work of PR officers.

Following Fawkes and Gregory (2000), who argue that, "the public relations professional is there to transmit a message with the purpose of persuading publics to the point of view being promulgated" (Ibid, p. 109), the chapter goes on by reviewing some core concepts of human communication. While the first sub-sections are generally focusing on processes of communication and interpretation, they are followed by a special focus on the human interpretation of text-based communication. The next section then discusses the concept of and previous research in computer-mediated communication (CMC), including a brief overview of its communicative technologies, characteristics and some old and new models of CMC. Moreover, as this thesis deals with the interpretation of text and language on Facebook, the chapter concludes with a discussion of language practice in an online environment by exploring what the invention of emoticons, abbreviations and the use of online language in general means for public relations in social media environment.

2.2. Public Relations in a Social Media World

Since the rise of the Internet, public relations has gone through a process of change (Steinke, 2015; Lipschultz, 2015; Heather, 2012). After decades of focusing on media relations and gatekeepers to spread the organisational messages, PR is now using social media to represent brands, to talk about its organisation and to get directly engaged with the customers. As a result of this process, social media has blurred the lines between advertising and PR (Lipschultz, 2015). However, before discussing the digital change of public relations, it needs to be defined what public relations is.

2.2.1. Public Relations as the Management of Communication

To distinguish journalism, public relations and advertising, Merten (2008) introduced the intersection model of journalism, public relations and advertising that compares and connects these three according to their claim to truth: while journalism should be as objective as possible with truth as its core function, advertising is seen as a field that is communicating positive messages for the organisations in blending things out that might not be attractive for this organisation. Following Merten's model, advertising is seen as rather truthless compared to journalism. Public relations, on the other hand, fits right inbetween these two poles: it tries to be as truthful as possible, but has to consider both the overall goal of the organisation and the image that PR actions will lead to. (Merten, 2008; Röttger, Preusse, Schmitt, 2014)

Following this, it is indisputable that trust is an important value for public relations and that it is the overall goal of every PR department to build trust and credibility and to influence the organisation's or the brand's reputation to create a great image for the organisation or the brand. (Fawkes, 2012; Mast, 2008; Merten, 1999)

2.2.1.1. Defining a Profession: What Exactly Is Public Relations?

Hundreds of experts have tried to define public relations in the past – with different results. Harlow (Fawkes, 2012) summarised 472 definitions of what public relations is with the following paragraph:

> "Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools." (Harlow, quoted in: Fawkes, 2012, p. 5)

While this quotation might be useful to understand briefly what public relations does, Fawkes (2012, p. 5) criticises exactly this point because it only "describes what PR does rather than what it is".

According to Gruning and Hunt (1984, p. 6), public relations is "the management of communication between an organisation and its public" while Long and Hazelton (1987, p. 6) see PR as "a communication function of management through which organisations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organisational goals". Botan (1992, p. 20), on the other hand, includes the relational aspect of PR and defines public relations as "the use of communication to adapt relationships between organisations and its public" while another aspect is added by Avenarius (2000), who is using Watzlawick's meta-communicative axiom "one cannot not communicate" (Kunczik, 2010, p. 15) to say that every communication with the organisation's public is more than a simple message. It is the messages' goal to create a relationship between the organisation and its public – scheduled or spontaneously. Yet, one of the German professional associations for public relations, the Deutsche Public Relations Gesellschaft [German for "German Public Relations Association"] writes on its official website that PR navigates and plans the organisation's communication process with the public. PR represents the interests of their clients in an informative and truthful, open and component dialogue (DPRG, 2011).

All these definitions have one thing in common: they see public relations as a communicative function (Heather, 2012, p. 423). For Lipschultz (2015), this communicative function and being able to communicate has always been at the heart of public relations. It is still the focus and one of the most important skills of every PR officer to manage communication and to communicate well with a certain target group (Fawkes, 2012; Mast, 2008), bearing in mind that every communication with the public is public relations (Avenarius, 2000). Fawkes (2012), outlines that this 'public' should not be understood as one homogeneous group because

> "there is no such thing as the public: there are instead many different groups of people – not just consumers, but suppliers, employees, trustees, members, local and national trade and political bodies and local residents, among many others. One of the key concepts of PR is the idea that these groups – or publics – have different information needs and exert different demands on organisations. Understanding these differences is a vital skill of PR." (Ibid, p. 7)

In relation to this and in the context of this thesis, which focuses on the communicative process with the customer, Christoph's (2009) definition of PR as the whole act of communication between an organisation and its environment is particularly apposite. It is interest-driven and designed for certain target groups.

Especially within the last two decades, this act of communication has changed. While for decades the aforementioned management of communication had a focus on communication strategies, on how to communicate with journalists and the mass media to influence the customers via newspapers, television and the radio, it now has enlarged its focus and included new social media tools to represent the organisation directly to engage with the customer (Lipschultz, 2015). This development will be discussed within the next sections.

2.2.2. Social Networking Sites and Social Media: The Rise of Internet

At the end of 2014, 79.1% of all German inhabitants were connected to the Internet (ZDF/ARD, 2015), using Google as the most visited website on the web, directly followed by Facebook. And according to its official statistics, Facebook claimed 968 million daily active users worldwide on average in June, 2015.

About 26 years after the British computer-scientist Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web in 1989, which was originally seen as a platform for scientific data exchange, the web has become a social superhighway for information and data.

> "Berners-Lee likely never imagined that the Internet would be accessible to every household and that it would facilitate communications throughout the world. (...) The Internet has evolved into a "social web" connecting like-minded individuals with communities that allow them to express themselves and engage in lengthy debates at any time of the day." (Weinberg, 2009)

The rise of what Weinberg calls the "social web" began in the first half of the 1990s when users started to communicate with each other using new online technologies and applications such as the instant messenger ICQ (Simon & Bernhardt, 2008). From then on, new tools, platforms and online communities were helping users to stay in contact, communicate via the Internet and share pictures, videos and other data. Van Dijck (2013) lists Blogger (1999), Wikipedia (2001), Myspace (2003), Facebook (2003), Flickr (2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006) as the most important social online applications of recent years.

Some scholars used the term Web 2.0 to describe the 'new version' of the Internet that was driven by its users. However, the aforementioned father of the Internet, Tim-

Berners Lee, criticised this term as follows: “Nobody really knows what it means ... If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people. But that was what the Web was supposed to be all along” (Berners-Lee, 2006). Taking this idea forward, Hinton and Hjorth (2013, p. 29) call Web 2.0 a “more advanced, updated, better version” of what the web was until then.

Users were now able to communicate in new ways and were spending more and more time of their daily life on the Internet. With their new ability of being part of the web, for example in sharing their thoughts and feelings or in uploading pictures from their life, users were socialising the Internet step by step, which led to the introduction of the term social media to name “Internet applications that enable the sharing of things” (van Dijk, 2012). Shirky (2008, p. 20f) summarises that these new social media tools “increase our ability to share, to co-operate, with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutional institutions and organizations”.

As a part of this development and a specific subcategory, social networking sites (SNS) such as MySpace and Facebook became more and more important. Hinton and Hjorth (2013) see these SNS as the perfect, definitive social media technology because “they are the interface through which people engage with social media, and increasingly they are the way that people engage with the internet”. (Ibid, p. 53)

2.2.2.1. Definition and Communicative Usage of Social Networking Sites

Boyd and Ellison (2008) define social networking sites as

> “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or senior public profile within a bounded system (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share corrections, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections

> and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site." (Ibid, p. 29)

While networked communication itself is not new for humans (van Dijk, 2012), networked communication within an online application is, at least compared to the offline version. As a result, SNS have influenced and are continuously influencing the way people organise their lives and communicate with each other (van Dijck, 2013). Following Fuchs (2014), this human aspect, the communication with each other, is what makes social networks really social, because this communication is a process that transmits human knowledge; including individual thoughts, feelings and information concerning the social relations of the people who are using these SNS. Lipschultz (2015) points out that this communicative process is happening in a cyber cultural context that has its own rules of how to communicate appropriately (for example, see chapter 2.5.). Social conditions, contexts and situations determine users' perceptions of communication within this environment. And because most of the communication within social networking sites is happening interpersonally between friends, these users have formed new rules and norms of how to communicate within the online networks. Through Facebook in particular, which is one of the dominant SNS at the time of writing (Hunsinger & Senft, 2014), there is strong evidence that people want to get in touch, stay connected to each other, share details of their everyday lives and how and what they are and, quite simply, interact and communicate in a social way. As a result, both the Internet in general (Shklovski, Kraut & Cummings, 2008) and global social networks in particular have played an important role in changing the way people communicate online generally and set new social norms about this process of online communication within its SNS (van Dijck, 2013). According to Fuchs (2014, p.5),

> "Computer-mediated communication did not start with Facebook and Twitter: Ray Tomlinson sent the first email from one computer to the other in 1971. If we understand social activity to mean communication or symbolic interaction, then not all media use is social. Based on this understanding it is not social if you write a document alone, but it is social to send an email or chat with a friend on Facebook."

Thus, it is useful to know how to communicate within these new spaces and "to consider social networks from an individual member's point of view" (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011, p. 36) if PR wants to be successful in these SNS.

2.2.3. Overview of the Impact on Public Relations: Digital PR within SNS

Following the aforementioned rise of the Internet and SNS and the fact that these new communication technologies are now a normal part of people's daily communicative lives, this section focuses on the effects both the Internet and especially social networking sites have had on public relations and introduces the field of digital public relations.

For decades, journalists were argued to be the perfect channel through which to reach PR's target groups (Lipschultz, 2015; Gust, 2011; Mast, 2008). However, with the rise of the Internet traditional media are no longer the only way to reach people. As a result, public relations has not only experienced a transformation, but it has also used the opportunities given and enlarged its abilities. (Fawkes, 2012; Heather, 2012; Morris & Goldsworthy, 2012) Now PR departments are able to publish their own information and communicate directly with their audiences. (Fawkes, 2012) These new and direct connections to different target groups offered by social networking sites and other tools have had the biggest impact on PR in its long history (Fawkes, 2012; Wright & Hinson, 2009) and have given professionals plenty of new possibilities to influence their public image and to participate in the formation of public opinions (Schulz-Bruhdoel & Bechtel, 2009). Following this development, Lipschultz (2015, p. 69) argues that the “emphasis is moving from press releases and traditional media relations to “shareable online content” with a relatively new interest in the direct reach of a message”. Twitter and Facebook, as only two examples, give corporations the opportunity to reach journalists, but also to communicate directly with a wider variety of publics (McCorkindale, 2010).

This transformation towards digital and social media has led to the introduction of ‘digital public relations’. Morris and Goldsworthy describe digital PR as follows:

> “Digital PR is about the use of new media, especially the internet, to further PR objectives. In this sense it is distinct from other PR specialisms: it is not about a particular sector – digital PR can be used in all arenas; and although in its focus on one sector of the media it involves a particular skillset it is unlike other forms of public relations.” (Ibid, p. 87)

While scholars such as Fawkes (2012) mention that the traditional media are still important for public relations, PR now has one more, powerful tool to reach their customers and spread the word. For Newsom, VanSlyke Turk and Kruckeberg (2000), in the 21st century it is impossible to make effective PR without the use of the Internet. Yet, for Wright and Hinson it is

> “an understatement to suggest that Social Media have had a huge impact on the practice of public relations since the first weblogs, or blogs, appeared more than a dozen years ago. This has continued and increased as Social Media have developed into a number of different forms” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p. 3).

As a reaction of this development, PR departments and agencies all over the world have hired experts on digital public relations and social media or even opened specialist units (Morris & Goldsworthy, 2012) which do their best to reach new audiences (Gillin, 2008) via social media.

In 2010 McCorkindale analysed fanpages of Facebook to determine how corporations were using them and found that many PR departments did not know what to do with Facebook. Only very few of them were using the two-way relationship building capabilities of Facebook, for example: "Overall, companies (…) were taking advantage of the opportunities of Facebook, but not utilizing this medium to its fullest extent." (Ibid, 2010, p. 11)

However, with PR's new interest in digital PR and direct communication with possible customers within SNS like Facebook, organisations are now trying to be as important and influential for the users of these SNS as their actual friends and followers (Lipschultz, 2015). They are trying to construct new, direct relationships with their clients with the overall goal of trust and reputation. But although it has always been the goal of public relations to reach and influence the end customers – even when done through newspapers and via journalists – PR professionals now need to rethink how to use their most important tool – communication – in SNS environments. Without the abovementioned journalists as filters, messages and posts are reaching the clients directly and unfiltered within their personal social network and within their personal environment.

Within Facebook, Twitter or other social media, PR is no longer an exclusive business between PR officers and journalists. As PR professionals now have to communicate with nearly everyone (Wright & Hinson, 2009) and compose messages that could easily be read by everyone, they "have to think carefully about the implications" (Morris & Goldsworthy, 2012, p. 145).

In this context, Morris & Goldsworthy (2012) refer to the importance of using the right language within Facebook and other SNS. Coombs & Holladay (2007, p. 12) underline this by arguing that a user of these networks "packages himself in the language of his relationship to the dominant medium". While especially in the early years of the Internet the digital, interpersonal language that is done through the usage of computers (CMC) (see section 2.4.) was not seen to be as rich as face-to-face communication (Lipschultz, 2015), the users now have experienced how to use the abilities and resources of the World Wide Web properly to build friendly and trustable conversations (see section 2.5) – and this usage of language phraseology might be of interest for public relations. Evans, Twomey and Talan (2011, p. 10) found that, "companies that use language or a tone that is too corporate come across as fake. Like in any medium, you need to adapt your content, tone and style to be relevant to your audience."

For Morris & Goldsworthy (2012) this new usage of language and the new techniques that were introduced with the rise of social media were the original reasons that led to the importance of digital public relations because they were unfamiliar for both public relations and the PR people who grew up in a non-digital world. Heather (2012) argues that:

> "In under a decade digital public relations has developed from crafting content to engaging 24:7 with online communities. This has been driven by changes in technology that enable publics to act as equals and amplify crisis situations. As well as continuing to provide accessible information for those undertaking online searches, PR practitioners need to be active in social networks to build relationships and managing organizational reputation. Looking backwards we can see how potentially the role of digital PR has changed from a tactical to a strategic one." (Ibid, p. 415)

In addition, she outlines that especially SNS like Facebook "require a different strategic response from organizations as they allow for greater interactivity, but may also be seen as personal space where professional communicators are not welcome" (Heather, 2012, p. 414).

And although she generally welcomes the new possibilities given by the Internet and SNS, she is not sure where the development of digital PR will lead to in the future. She sees a potential information overload on the side of both the users and the PR professionals:

> "If the growth trends of these and other online sites continue, it is inevitable that information overload will make it harder and harder to monitor, engage and make an impact. There are also concerns about the ability of online technologies to cope with such volumes of information and discussion in that a separate internet may need to be launched offering more selective, but faster, access – at a price. It should also be remembered that the increased volume of information contains much outdated and arguably decayed data." (Ibid, p. 421)

According to Lipschultz (2015, p. 40), the whole development of this new, digital communication, especially within a social media environment, is "a current test of our ability to create meaningful online communities, relationships and social movements". Thus, PR professionals might need to learn more about online communication in order to communicate in such a way that their target group feels as though they have been communicated with. Fawkes (2012) argues that it is essential to understand the whole process of human communication and interpretation to use public relations effectively for its different target groups.

2.3. Communication as the Core of Public Relations

In the previous section it was discussed what public relations is and how the rise of the Internet and especially social media has affected PR. Based on this and the fact that public relations can be seen as fundamentally concerned with communication practice, this section considers the whole concept of human communication. Fawkes and Gregory (2000) argue that, "the public relations professional is there to transmit a message with the purpose of persuading publics to the point of view being promulgated" (Ibid, p. 109),

2.3.1. The Process of (Human) Communication

People communicate every day of their lives. They even communicate before they are able to speak and to use language, using nonverbal elements like sounds and gestures (Fawkes, 2012). In 1977, Merten found more than 160 definitions about what communication is or what it means (Merten, 1999). Reichertz (2009) agrees with Merten's argument that a final definition of communication is missing because human communication is a living, self-changing process and the history of communication is ongoing.

Following Maletzke (1963), we can understand human communication in general as a procurement of meanings between humans (Burkart, 2002). With this understanding of communication, we simultaneously exclude all non-human kinds of communication, e.g., the data handling communication between computers and other machines, and put communication back into its human, social perspective.

Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004, p. 17) contend that Shannon and Weaver's model of a source/sender, a message and a receiver is "the most well known way" of thinking about communication and how it works.

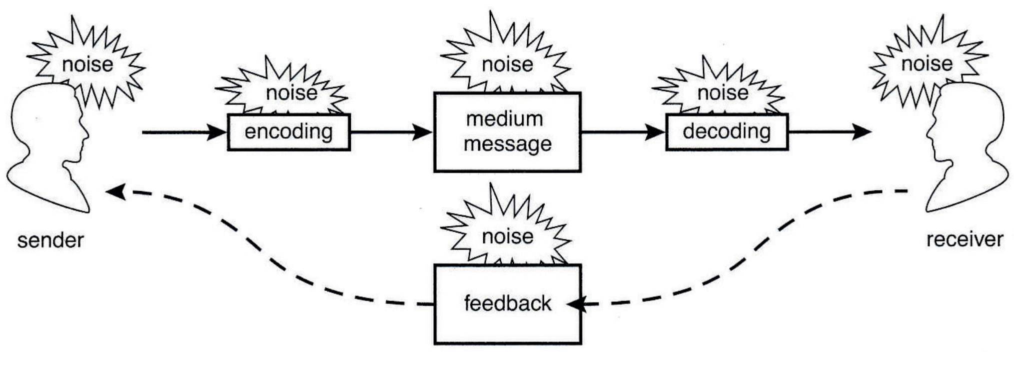
In Shannon and Weaver's communication model, every communication, human or inhuman, starts with the production or selection (encodation) of a special piece of information at the stage of the sender/source. The created message passes a channel – e.g. a newspaper or simply the mouth and the ear – that transmits it to the receiver. The receiver simply decodes this message in order to understand its meaning and, if necessary, to give some feedback, as illustrated in figure 2.1 (Fawkes, 2012).

What impacts the right interpretation or the whole communicative process is what Shannon and Weaver call noise (Fawkes, 2012). For Shannon and Weaver, who both used to work for Bell Telephones, this noise was first and foremost due to technical problems and physical interferences, such as the interruption during a telephone call. Years later, Fiske (1990) – who the researcher would more agree with – broadened the definition of noise to include

> "anything that is added to the signal between transmission and reception that is not intended by the source" (Fiske, 1990, p. 8).

With this small change, Fiske made the originally more technical Shannon and Weaver model a lot more usable in human communication. While, on the one hand, noise was now something like daydreaming, a physical discomfort or simply a wrong language, this noise still has the same effect: the receiver, e.g. the person to whom one is speaking, might not be able to receive or – much more importantly – to decode the transmitted message and to understand its meaning.

2.1. Harrison's Adoption of Shannon & Weaver's Model



(Source: Harrison (1995, p. 30). In: Fawkes, 2012, p. 25)

Mentioning the meaning of a message, this one is more complex than one may think, too. According to Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004),

> "the meaning of a message does not reside in words, but is much more fluid and dependent on the context, shifting constantly from place to place, from person to person, and from moment to moment." (Ibid, p. 17)

Following this, human communication is first and foremost about the sharing of information between at least two humans. The word communication comes from the Latin word communicare, which simply means, "to share" (Lewis & Short, 1963).

Writers or speakers, as an example of the sender, share some information via spoken or written messages with a receiver, in this case a listener or a reader (Hard af Segerstad, 2002). We transmit this information, ideas, attitudes or emotions from one person to another (or to a group) using symbols, such as letters and words (Fawkes, 2012) or other communicative elements that will be discussed later.

2.3.2. Code and the Meaning of Communication

What is also important for successful communication, and with this for the transmission mentioned above, is that both the sender and the receiver are using the same code. In human communication, this code is based on a system of symbols that is made out of words (language) and nonverbal signs such as gestures that we all have learned how to interpret during our life. These symbol systems help us to understand each other, since we have not only learned what letters are and how to interpret them, but we have also learned how to use and understand language and, for example, know that the four letters F-O-O-D mean something to eat (van Dijk, 2012). According to Bruner and Olson (1973),

> "instruction through language is limited to rearranging, ordering and differentiating knowledge or information that the listener already has available from other sources such as modelling or through his own direct experiences" (Ibid: 220).

Thus, it all depends on everyone's own experience – and we cannot understand or interpret unknown words or unknown behaviour. Fawkes (2012, p. 22) argues that it is "at best limited, at worst impossible" to communicate without a shared meaning and understanding of words and symbols.

As mentioned above, this meaning consists of more than the simple knowledge of what a word stands for. It is also about the feelings of the receiver while interpreting the word – something that might be especially important for PR departments that would like to improve the organisation's image. This field of study is called semiotics – and semiotic researchers such as Ferdinand de Saussure, are

> "not interested in sources, or where messages come from – only in how meaning is created in the mind of the receiver. It argues that audiences 'decode' images and words according to their own personal, cultural or social terms of references to obtain their own meaning of a message" (Fawkes, 2012, p. 28).

According to Fawkes, semiotics help us to think about the meanings of words. A simple word like "sun" does not only come with its dictionary meaning, but also creates images and feelings in the mind of the reader or listener. Thus, communicators, e.g., PR practitioners, should think carefully about how people might use and interpret their messages (Fawkes, 2012).

Thus communication – whether it is spoken, written or non-verbal – is about the encoding (on the side of the sender) and decoding (on the side of the receiver) of messages. Understanding the intended message is only possible if the respondent decodes the message in the way the sender meant it. Consequently, both of the involved humans (e.g. PR professional and Facebook users) need the same code system (Burkart, 2002).

2.3.3. Communication: A Social Activity that Builds Relations

Semiotics and the usage of language are not the only things that affect the interpretation of a message. Burkart (2002) contends that every communication refers to someone. While language might be a key part of communication and understanding, other things are important.

Van Dijk argues that:

> "Social Networks are as old as humanity. Human individuals have always communicated more with some people than with others since the time they lived in small bands in tribes" (van Dijk, 2012, p. 25ff).

What van Dijk originally used to describe our 'nervous system of society' reveals another point about the complex structure of human communication: communication is a social process, which explains why human communication studies – in our scientific universe – are under the roof of social sciences.

Hard af Segerstad (2002) argues that the social part in all of us reminds us that we are part of "a culture and one or more social institutions" (Ibid, p. 14). We all deal with things like emotions, perception and understanding. These social feelings are what make us human. We are not hunting animals, dealing only with our prey. We care about others – and others care about us. We are part of a very social society and, as a result, this social society and our experience in being part of this society is not only constructing our social behaviour, but also influences the way we communicate to and with each other because our experience is helping us to choose the right words and to communicate appropriately in a certain situation (Burkart, 2002).

This social aspect of communication leads to the conclusion that our human society is based on relationships – much like PR. However, van Dijk (2012) argues that we "have always communicated more with some people than with others" (Ibid, p. 25ff). The assortment of those who are the "some people", like the ones whom we call our circle of friends, is more likely the result of a social and emotional process. This process also helps us to learn what relationships mean for our communication. We all handle different kinds of relationships in our life and not all of them are as close as the ones to our partners, our family and friends. Moreover, we have some kind of a relationship to all other human beings in our life, like our doctor, the cashier in the supermarket or a police officer. Although the reasons for a conversation with them may vary, we sometimes have to communicate with them. Like Reichertz (2010), Hard af Segerstad (2002) argues that the nature of these relationships affects the way we communicate and choose language, too.

In fact, the relationship between the involved humans and historically learned rules helps us decide whether we choose formal or informal words and how we understand and interpret our counterpart in communication. Thus, it is important to know in which framework our communication takes place and in which context we communicate (Henning & Huth, 1975; Reichertz, 2010). A journalistic interview, a police questioning and an examination are similar in the sense of language but the relationship of the involved people, the social context and historically learned knowledge of how to communicate appropriately in these situations define the conversation. According to Hymes (1974), we are very skilful and choose how to communicate based on the social context of the given situation. For him, the "setting" (in this case the time and space of a conversation) and the "scene" (the psychological setting during this conversation) determine the course of communication. Hard af Segerstad (2002) argues that

> "people adapt their verbal language use according to who is talking and who is listening, and it seems plausible to assume that they do likewise in written communication" (Ibid, p. 18).

Our social experience helps us not only to decide how to communicate in different situations, but also to understand our respondents in the right way (Henning & Huth, 1975). This is why some people choose a more formal, serious kind of communication in one and a more informal kind of communication in another setting (Hymes, 1974). At the same time, and as mentioned earlier, the ability to communicate is a learning by doing processes such as copying, adopting, internalising and modifying (Reichertz, 2009). It is important to choose a language and words that both we and our respondents understand (Henning & Huth, 1975). We only choose these languages and words out of the repertory that is learned, standardised and approved (Rusch, 1994).

2.3.4. The Interpretation of Communication

While the previous section explained how we communicate with each other and why our human, social relationships to other people matter, it is important to consider how we interpret each other correctly and how the interpretation process works more broadly.

Reichertz (2010) argues that the right interpretation of messages is a mixture of all the things mentioned above. We have to understand the code the sender is sending, we have to know something about the social context and the relationship between us and our communication partner and – especially – we have to use the knowledge about communication that we have gained during our lives. Thus, interpretation is no longer only about words, but rather the whole act of communication. And this communicative act, including its context, has a very special form with unique attributes. If the receiver realises all the special, learned attributes, he or she also realises the act of communication and has a chance to interpret the receiver in the right way (Reichertz, 2009). In other words, and following Reichertz, understanding is not the problem: we only have to realise all the signals and match them with everything we have learned about them during our lives.

But what if we do not understand all the signals? What if something happens that we are not used to? According to Dickey, McLure, Wasko, Chudoba and Bennett Thatcher (2006), humans are intelligent enough to handle this situation, too.

> "When individuals receive new information, they interpret it based on their perceptions of the social context, using those perceptions to "fill in the blanks," deriving expectations for interaction." (Ibid, p. 70)

What helps us in the process of understanding and interpretation is the concept of mediation. This concept considers the way messages are transmitted. Following Fawkes, unmediated communication is any kind of communication that "does not pass through a channel or medium" (2012, p. 23). Whether this direct face-to-face communication is one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many, it always contains variables, like non-verbal gestures, body language and facial expressions. According to Mehrabian (1968) and Misoch (2006), only seven percent of our face-to-face communication takes the form of words, 38 percent takes the form of paralanguage (a non-verbal element of communication, used to show emotions and modify meanings) and 55 percent takes the form of body language. Misoch (2006) acts on the assumption that especially the body language is sent partly unconsciously. Thus, we all say a lot more than we think while speaking face-to-face and all these non-verbal signals are helping us to understand and interpret the messages correctly (Reichertz, 2010). Humans benefit greatly from being able to observe the person with whom they are in communication. According to Reichertz (2010), this is simply a result of the missing consultations between sender and receiver during their communication. Van Dijk (2012) argues that if the communication is mediated:

> "Direct human experience has always been an observation of reality involving all the senses simultaneously. This consists not only of knowledge, but also of skills (for instance mental, social and communicative skills), values, feelings and abstractions. Compared with this, mediated communication always involves particular restrictions. Here the use of all senses is impossible." (van Dijk, 2012, p. 235)

Thus, mediated communication is that kind of communication that passes through a channel, a newspaper or a computer for example, to reach the receiver. This channel will automatically affect the message during its transportation (Fawkes, 2012). The varieties of usable channels are many, ranging from printed materials like books, newspapers and magazines to audio-visual broadcasting media, to computer-mediated channels like Facebook and other SNS. Each of these channels affects the message differently due to its technical capabilities (see chapter 3.3). Following Salomon, all different channels

> "can cause different meanings to be ascribed to one and the same content. Listening to a sound recording of a speech will result in meanings other than those obtained by reading its literal transcription" (Salomon, 1979, p. 78).

While the content of both might be exactly the same, the different channels will reach different parts of the human brain and the result might be a slightly different interpretation of the message. In addition, he argues that the skills and the knowledge of the receiver are important, too. Thus, according to van Dijk, "less educated people depend more on the mode of communication concerned than better educated people do" (van Dijk, 2012, p. 240). Consequently, it might be more difficult for people who are not used to the new rules of CMC (for more, see chapter 2.4 of this thesis) to interpret mediated communication via SNS correctly.

In general, this mediated communication is still the kind of communication which is most relevant for public relations – especially in the form of written texts, the focus of the next section.

2.3.5. Text-Based Communication

While PR communication that does not take place face-to-face is more complicated than the one that does, text-based communication is the most difficult kind of communication (Reichertz, 2010; Rusch, 1994). The researcher agrees with Dickey et al. (2006) that

> "text-based communication occurs through two processes: the inscription of text by a sender and the interpretation of text by a receiver. Inscription results in the creation of text, which can then be interpreted by one or more other participants in the environment. (...) Inscription by itself does not result in communication. Once created, text must be read and interpreted in order for communication to occur" (Ibid, p. 69ff).

However, each interpretation of written texts depends on the reader and the reader decodes and interprets the written lines only in the way he or she wants to (Rusch, 1994).

In addition, the medium in which the text is written influences the interpretation as well. The reader always meets a written text in a particular environment, e.g., in a newspaper while having breakfast or in an email at work.

> "Therefore we bring to the text a great deal of background knowledge, predictions and expectations, which help us make sense of what we see. It's only when we meet a new kind of text which we have never experienced before (either because of a cultural change or a new technological invention – or when a text takes on an unfamiliar guise, such as political propaganda masquerading as an advert) that we need time to readjust our mindset in order to decode accurately the information in the text." (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001)

Again, the understanding of a written text depends on the historically learned point of view, the interpretation and the expectations of the reader. There is always the possibility that one reader could understand a written line totally differently than another (Rusch, 1994). As mentioned above, what controls our understanding and expectation is the kind of medium in which we read the text. A reader of an article in a magazine could expect, interpret and understand this text totally differently than a reader who will read the exact same article in a textbook (Henning & Huth, 1975). Fawkes (2012) argues that "communication sent is not always – if ever – the same as communication received" (Ibid, p. 25).

Accordingly, it is of paramount importance for the writer, e.g. the PR professional, to know who the audience is and what this target group will expect. Fortunately, our everyday communication practice is highly standardised in the sense of language and writing (Rusch, 1994). Today we know a lot about different styles of writing, about how to use technical language and professional terminology. We also know the differences between writing a scientific article for a journal or a more common article for a local newspaper. Very importantly for this thesis, we have learned how to write and/or interpret different textual genres, like news, documentaries and reports on the one hand and literature texts on the other (Rusch, 1994).

The degree to which and how our expectations differ between different genres and media was tested by Henning and Hunt (1975) as far back as 1973. They wanted to know what pupils expect from a text with the exact same topic in a textbook and one in a popular newspaper by asking them to write down possible headlines for both media. Eighty-one pupils participated and nearly all headlines for the textbook article put the focus on the instructive, warning and moral part of the article while the headlines for the newspaper were more sensational. As a result, Henning and Hunt concluded that text genre affects our expectations and that, in this case, the reality of a textbook is a more moral one while the reality of a popular newspaper is more sensational.

Thus, for good communication to occur via text, the goal and the structure of the written text is important (Reichertz, 2010). As mentioned, reading is not an interactive process, since there is no direct opportunity to clear up a misunderstanding of the reader. Nothing other than lines and words will guide the ones who read a text. In order to avoid misinterpretations, a lot of writing genres aim for standardisation in our modern world. For example, journalism takes particular forms and the consumer of such pieces has learned how to interpret these. Our social experience is important for text interpretation, too (Henning & Huth, 1975). What we need is a shared understanding about the type of text we are reading and its social context (Dickey et al., 2006). Reichertz (2010) argues that authors who articulate messages problematically may reach neither their target group nor their communication goals.

Since this dissertation focuses on the interpretation of text-based public relations communication in an online world, it is important to consider how computers and the Internet have influenced and changed the way we communicate with each other. All this will be discussed within the following sections.

2.4. Computer-Mediated Communication

Having presented theories and concepts of human communication and especially the interpretation of text-based communication in the previous section, this part of the literature review now focuses on the role that computers, smartphones and, more generally, technology play when being used to transmit PR's messages.

To explore the form of communication between humans through the use of computers requires an analysis of academic literature in the field of computer-mediated communication (CMC) research. Theories of CMC deal with the role transmitting technology plays in our daily communication. Following Lipschultz (2015), CMC not only helps to better understand online communication and the foundations of social media, but "it also is a framework for understanding social media applications in fields such as journalism, public relations, advertising and marketing" (Lipschultz, 2015, p. 43). Thurlow et al. (2004) argue that the history of CMC "is little more than fifty years old" (Ibid, p. 14) yet at this point in time it would be hard for most of us to live without computers for communicative purposes.

For Thurlow et al. (2004),

> "'computer mediated communication' essentially refers to any human kind of communication achieved through, or with the help of, computer technology" (Ibid, p. 15).

With this definition, Thurlow et al. have articulated the nature of CMC succinctly. John December, a well-known and long-time researcher on CMC, adds that

> "Computer Mediated Communication is a process of human communication via computers, involving people, situated in particular contexts, engaging in processes to shape media for a variety of purposes" (December, 1997).

Susan Herring argues that:

> "CMC is communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers." (Herring, 1996, p. 1)

With this last definition, Herrings breaks CMC down to its roots. While this human communication occurs through the use of two or more networked computers (McQuail, 2005), these computers affect the Shannon and Weaver model of communication mentioned in the first part of this chapter. Using computers to communicate with each other, we have to add two of them to the familiar model of source/sender, message and receiver: one computer as the 'input medium' which delivers the message to the channel (in this case the Internet) and one as the 'output medium' which delivers the received signal to its target, the receiver (Fischer, 2005; Misoch, 2006).

While all this is only a change in the way the communicative message is transmitted to its receiver, it also affects the way messages are interpreted by the receiver, especially concerning text-based communication. It follows that whether they use Facebook, Twitter or some other new SNS, PR professionals' communication practices need not only be contextualised in the light of theories of communication (see section 3.1), but some theories of CMC may also be noted while communicating the organisation's message online. Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic thus argue that "in some ways it's almost as if we are experiencing communication anew, and yet in other ways, nothing's changed" (2004, p. 17).

2.4.1. Communication Technologies in CMC

Before taking a deeper look into some theories of CMC, this section will introduce and discuss some of the core characteristics of CMC in general.

Herring (1996) argues that what has changed in times of the Internet is that humans now possess more tools and ways to share thoughts, meanings and information with one another. We no longer need to be, for example, in the same spot at the same time (as during a real-world face-to-face conversation) to communicate with our receiver. The Internet and its communication technologies have given us a lot of new tools to communicate with anyone with access to the Internet at any given time in the world. Thurlow et al. (2004, p. 30) call this ability to communicate directly with one another the "real value of the Internet".

While all this online communication happens with the help of the web, computer-mediated communication using one tool/technology is not always the same as another. The Internet itself is more like a framework, a collection of different communication technologies (Misoch, 2006), each one of them with a very particular focus. Thurlow et al. (2004) argue that these technologies and tools that allow us to use the Internet for our daily communication are evolving and emerging all the time, whilst Hard af Segerstad (2002) notes that

> "different forms, or modes, of CMC have different conditions for communication. They allow for different types of interaction, are used for different purposes and have a different impact on language use and message content." (Ibid, p. 55)

In addition, most of these messages sent and received with the help of CMC are text-based (Thurlow et al., 2004; Hard af Segerstad, 2002). Yet, Misoch (2006) argues that the Internet helped text-based communication to an unexpected renaissance. According to Misoch (2006) and Fischer (2005), this mediated communication, completed with the help of different technologies and tools of the Internet, can be distinguished into two main groups. The first one is based on the factor of time that a message needs for the transfer between encoding at the side of the sender and decoding at the side of the receiver. It is about the synchronicity or asynchronicity of CMC. The second group deals with the range of people that will receive the PR messages sent using CMC.

2.4.1.1. Synchronicity vs. Asynchronicity CMC

A key aspect of CMC is the dimension of the time lag between the sender and the receiver of a message, because this time lag is influencing the way people communicate with each other. Typically, CMC used to distinguish between synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication. However, as technologies and tools have evolved, this differentiation also evolved. Yet, as it might be of importance for PR officers and users to know that a Facebook post was created or will be read in a different situation, the concepts of asynchronous and synchronous forms of CMC will be presented in the following sections.

Asynchronous CMC (ACMC)

According to Hard af Segerstad (2002),

> "asynchronous CMC is communication that does not require participants to be online and available at the same time or place in order for communication to take place successfully" (Ibid, p. 58).

The composer of the message, the sender, does not necessarily have to be online while writing the message. The message can thus be planned and written without any time pressure – which makes it a lot easier for the sender to think about what he or she really wants to say and how to write it (Hard af Segerstad, 2005). Back in 2005, Fischer argued that the email was one of the most important forms of asynchronous, text-based online communication while blogs – which are more important for PR professionals – are another form of asynchronous CMC. Both forms of communication can come with a very clear lag of time between sending the message on the side of the sender and reading it on the side of the receiver (a message is not read until the receiver decides to read it; it needs his or her action), which makes a direct conversation hard to achieve (Misoch, 2006).

While Hard af Segerstad (2002) notes that CMC through email, for example, is still a lot faster than traditional "snail mail", Fischer (2005) argues that a continuous exchange of information between sender and receiver is still not given due to the fact that both are still separated from each other and the processes of encoding and decoding happens at different points of time. A common understanding of the social context of the messages sent and received is still missing, too (Ibid). Although all these points date back to the early years of CMC, the time lag that lies between encoding and decoding and the possibly missing context might be of importance for organisational Facebook posts that are in almost all cases read asynchronously by the users.

Synchronous CMC (SCMC)

Whereas sender and receiver do not necessarily have to be online at the same time in order to use an asynchronous technology, they have to be online in the case of synchronous CMC. As the name suggests, synchronous CMC happens while both of the users are in front of their Internet devices, communicating simultaneously (Hard af Segerstad, 2002). Thus, encoding, transmission, decoding and the transmission of a new, returning (answer) message happen in sequence. Fischer (2005) argues that this makes the communicative process feel like a real-world face-to-face conversation. Before Internet technologies, such as MUDs and real-time chats, became a part of our communicative life, a synchronous form of mediated communication only occurred during a telephone call. Until this point text-based communication was asynchronous only (Misoch, 2006). Using real-time chats, (e.g. ICQ or the Facebook chat) or other synchronous tools of CMC turns written online communication into an interactive, text-based dialogue. Hard af Segerstad (2002) contends that,

> “the communicative situation could be compared to that of a cocktail party, albeit a virtual one. Users type their written contributions to the conversation, which are displayed in the chat window to everybody that is logged in. Similar to a cocktail party, one may overhear, or rather “oversee”, other conversations going on in the chat room.” (Ibid, p. 59)

While all this happening synchronously may feel like a face-to-face conversation, several points make synchronous CMC still different from a real-world face-to-face conversation. Crystal (2001) for example points out that there is always a lag between the encoding and decoding of a message – simply due to the time that is needed to type words and sentences into the physical or virtual keyboard. Thus, the faster the communicative process is happening, the closer it comes to a face-to-face conversation and the more intense it feels for the ones participating (Misoch, 2006).

Speed also plays an important role in using synchronous CMC – and according to Fischer (2005) this speed makes the communication more spontaneous. Using asynchronous CMC technologies gives the sender more time to think about the written messages. However, using synchronous CMC tools removes the ability to rethink a message – due to speed and the need of immediate feedback – and makes the respondent answer more quickly. These quick reactions may also be the reason why messages sent via an Internet relay chat differ from asynchronous messages in length, complexity and formality (Crystal, 2011; Herring, 2002).

On the other hand, as Hard af Segerstad (2002) argues, this speed can be counted as a "plus" in the sense of the social presence of both participants. The theory of social presence, which will be discussed in section 3.3.3.1 in more detail, refers to the exchange of cues in mediated communication, and, according to Hard af Segerstad (2002),

> "the more speed associated with the exchange of cues in a mediated interaction, the higher "social presence" associated with that medium" (Ibid, p. 60).

While the whole concept of subdividing CMC technologies into asynchronous and synchronous forms of communication might have been quite simple in the early days of CMC, it is more difficult to distinguish new technologies as part of these two groups today. SNS like Facebook and Google+ for example both have a messaging system that is similar to a traditional email system – but for users who are online the same tool turns into a realtime chat with a built-in button for a videochat with the person the user is speaking/writing with. Applications like Skype and WhatsApp do the same; they can be used as an asynchronous form of communication if the receiver of the message is not online, but they turn into a synchronous form of CMC as soon as the receiver is. With all these new tools one could start a conversation thinking it is asynchronous, but it might turn into a synchronous form within seconds (e.g. a Facebook chat or a conversation using the posts commentary function) – with all its advantages and disadvantages. This applies to both the user and the PR professional.

2.4.1.2. Sender and Receivers: One or Many?

Besides the factor of time a message needs for its interpretation, CMC technologies are also concerned with the possible number of senders and receivers that are involved during the communicative process. Whether the communication is happening online or offline and based on its potential range all communication can be placed into the three following categories (Misoch, 2006).

One-to-One

Like the purest form of human communication – a private face-to-face conversation between two people – computer-mediated one-to-one communication involves only one sender and one receiver. Both transmit private messages to one another with the help of their computers (Misoch, 2006). Fischer (2005) argues that this kind of communication comes as close as possible to the Shannon and Weaver model of communication.

One-to-one communication can occur by using asynchronous and synchronous technologies (Fischer, 2005). An email sent from one outbox directly into the inbox of – only – one receiver might still be the best example of CMC. A private Facebook chat between two individuals would be a synchronous form of CMC.

One-to-Many

The model of one-to-many communication might be the form of communication that is most usable in public relations and in the media overall. Here, one person is sending a message that will possibly reach many receivers at once (Misoch, 2006). Asynchronously speaking, one-to-many CMC will occur using a mailing list or a newsletter to send a message or writing a blog post to inform as many people as possible at once. A more synchronous form of one-to-many CMC, on the other hand, could be a tweet on Twitter.

Many-to-Many

Communicating in groups is an example of many-to-many communication. As the name might suggest, multiple senders create messages that are transmitted to multiple receivers (Fischer, 2005; Misoch, 2006). Wikis[2], for example, are a form of asynchronous computer-mediated many-to-many communication, while an online group chat, for example in a WhatsApp group, is a form of synchronous many-to-many communication online.

However, Burnett and Marshall (2003) generally see communication within the Internet as a one-to-one form of mediated communication:

> "At the very core of the meaning of the Web is linkage and connections: it is fundamentally about modes of communication and presenting possibilities about how those modes might intersect. Thus, the web is simultaneously a mass-mediated and one-to-one form of communication. It is a site of incredible cultural consumption and cultural production and makes it harder to establish the boundary between these two activities." (Ibid, p. 59)

2 A **wiki** is a web-based software, which allows every user who sees the content to also edit it directly in the browser Therefore a wiki displays an easy to use platform to cooperatively work on a text (Ebersbach & Glaser, 2005).

2.4.2. Characteristics of CMC

Online technologies and tools such as Facebook and Twitter allow us to communicate in different ways compared to traditional mediated or unmediated communication. But like every other kind of communication, this computer-mediated communication also comes with its own characteristics exhibiting both strengths and weaknesses. Thus, and according to Dickey, McLure, Wasko, Chudoba and Bennett Thatcher (2006, p. 67), this online communication called CMC "is a double edged sword" – for users just as for PR professionals who are using CMC for their daily business.

2.4.2.1. Strengths of CMC

Concerning the strengths, van Dijk (2012) lists first and foremost five communication capabilities that are advantages of computer-mediated communication. Firstly, there is the possible speed of a message sent through the Internet. Whether the sender chooses to use Facebook, Twitter or simply an email, the message is sent and published within minutes or seconds – and, following Misoch (2006), there is no need for both sides of the message to be online simultaneously (in the case of asynchronous communication). In addition to this speed, the second plus of CMC is its potential geographical and social reach – with the ability to communicate easily with different people at different places. Unlike face-to-face communication, there is no need to be at the same place while communicating (Misoch, 2006). Thirdly, van Dijk (2012) lists CMC's huge, data-based storage potential and fourthly the technical accuracy of information transmitted. Finally, one capability that might play a bigger role in the sense of PR communication is the fifth benefit articulated by van Dijk: the selectivity of messages and addresses. He argues specifically that:

> "Much of the communication using print media is not addressed. (...) The telephone was the first fully selective medium used to address people. The new media advance this capacity by enabling us to systematically select (parts of) groups using email lists and the like." (Ibid, p. 17)

This new selectivity has the potential to give PR professionals the chance to communicate in a much more focused manner with their target groups.

2.4.2.2. Weaknesses of CMC

Most of the weaknesses of computer-mediated communication are based on the fact that most online communication is still written, text-based communication that is typed into the keyboard of the sender and displayed on the digital screen of the receiver (Hard af Segerstad, 2002; Misoch, 2006; van Dijk, 2012). As a consequence, sender and receiver are 'only' communicating via the use of written text. Van Dijk (Ibid) argues that the stimuli richness in CMC is thus not as high as it is in human face-to-face communication.

As discussed in section 3.2 of this thesis, human communication is always more than just words. We all use a complex system of different codes to communicate and especially to interpret messages. These codes and the ability to encode and decode messages correctly are premised on our historically learned rules and our social experiences. We have learned that a smiling face, for example, could give an insulting sentence an ironic meaning and – as a result – we are able to interpret the irony mode of the message (Misoch, 2006). Nonetheless, all this only works well face-to-face – if we have seen the non-verbal, smiling face of the sender. Thus, we need cues, such as gestures, body language, facial expressions and other non-verbal signs, to communicate optimally (van Dijk, 2012; Misoch, 2006).

Since CMC is mostly text-based and sender and receiver are not visible to each other, all these cues are missing online. According to van Dijk (2012, p. 238), “the non-verbal (social-gestural) mode is receiving the least attention in the new media”. These missing non-verbal signs make it harder for both sides of the message to communicate. Furthermore, without this non-verbal information, the humans involved in the communicative process might be less attentive.

According to Misoch (2006), the lack of physical presence leads to another problem in CMC: every kind of face-to-face communication happens in its very own context that makes it easier for both sides to “ground” the conversation (Fischer, 2005) and understand and interpret each other correctly. That online communication happens virtually and that the sender and receiver are separated from each other makes the contextual situation around the conversation often hard to notice. The process of understanding messages correctly is harder than during real-world communication (Misoch, 2006) as a consequence. These missing cues may result in misinterpretations that would not occur via face-to-face communication.

2.4.3. Theories of CMC

But what does all this mean for public relations? In particular the possible weaknesses discussed above, which include the reduction of (social) cues and the decontextualisation of mediated online communication, led early researchers of CMC to the assumption that CMC is an inferior communication type (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004). It was seen as asocial (i.e. cold and unfriendly) and antisocial (i.e. it diminishes face-to-face communication) (van Dijk, 2012). According to Thurlow et al. (2004),

> "compared with face-to-face (or FtF) communication, CMC is impoverished, impersonal, ineffectual and emotionally cold" (Ibid, p. 47).

This view of CMC was generally supported in the earlier models of CMC that Thurlow et al. (2004) call "Deficit Approaches" due to the fact that, above all, text-based online communication "lacks important qualities of FtF (face-to-face) communication".

2.4.3.1. The Social Presence Theory

Introduced by the Communications Studies Group at University College London, social presence theory focuses on the idea that the social effects of any mediated communication are caused by the degree of social presence between the sender and receiver of a message. For Short, Williams & Christie (1976), the authors of this theory, social presence means

> "the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" (Ibid, p. 64).

Social presence is all about the degree of intimacy. A medium with a high level of intimacy – and a high level of social presence – leads to a very warm, friendly and personal atmosphere (Misoch, 2006). But all media produce different levels of social presence (van Dijk, 2012) and the fewer channels within a communication process, the less attention is paid by the user (Short et al., 1976). That means that CMC is predicted to be extremely low in social presence whereas face-to-face communication is much richer (Walther, 1992, Thurlow et al.; 2004). This outcome is a consequence of the reduction of nonverbal signals in text-based CMC. According to Kiesler (1986),

> "without nonverbal tools, a sender cannot easily alter the mood of the message, communicate a sense of individuality, or exercise dominance or charisma (...). Communicators feel a greater sense of anonymity and detect less individuality in others." (Ibid, p. 48)

In addition to that, social presence adherents argue that this influences the awareness of each other during a (online) conversation and leads to a more task-oriented kind of communication (Thurlow et al., 2004).

According to Misoch (2006), one of the main problems of this early CMC research is that Short et al. did not consider the full subjective perception. For Misoch, perception depends on experiences and individual factors – and these factors influence how individual receivers interpret the medium the message was sent through. Thus, social presence is not an attribute of the medium (Rutter, 1987). Baym (2010) argues that what counts is the psychological perception of each other while using a medium, not the medium itself. Additionally, Thurlow et al. (2004) criticise the assumption that – for a high social presence – face-to-face communication is the optimal form of communication.

> "You just have to think about a really boring class you've attended to know that FtF, bodily presence is no guarantee of warm, personal, or sociable communication!" (Thurlow et al., 2004, p. 49)

2.4.3.2. The Cuelessness Model

The social presence model leads directly to a second theory posited in the early days of CMC research: the cuelessness model. From this perspective it is argued that nonverbal cues (such as gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and appearance) and identity markers (such as status, occupational role, age and gender) of the sender normally help us to decide what kind of language we should use, how to interpret the sender and how to regulate our interaction with the person we are talking to (Thurlow et al., 2004).

However, we are only able to 'read' all these cues in a face-to-face setting. A medium that is technically not able to transmit as many social cues as we are able to send face-to-face is defined as relatively cueless (Rutter, 1987) – and this was especially the case with CMC in the early digital world (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). Lack of cues created a 'psychological distance' according to Thurlow et al., (2004). Kemp and Rutter (1982) argued that the more cueless the setting, the more task-oriented and impersonal the content of the discussion and the less spontaneous and emotional the style of conversation (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Rice, 1987).

Following Spears and Lea (1992), the most critical point about the cuelessness model is the way it is generalised. Sometimes the missing information about the conversational partner could be a plus – for example during an intimate conversation. Thus, it does not depend on the medium itself but on the purpose of the conversation and the expectations of the participants if the absence of cues is considered a bad or a good thing. Thurlow et al. (2004) however criticise that a conversation high in cuelessness can still be psychologically close, for example in the exchange of a written love note between two people.

Walther et al. (1994) also found that computer-mediated communication is not per se as emotionally cold and task-oriented as was thought earlier. Baym (2010) argues that,

> "Because computer-mediated interactions are unable to see, hear, and feel one another, they can't use the usual cues conveyed by appearance, nonverbal signals, and features of the physical context. Mediated communication may be better than face to face interaction for some tasks, but for those involving personal identities and feelings, mediation was depicted as inherently inferior" (Baym, 2010, p. 54).

2.4.3.3. The Reduced Social Cues Model

While the cuelessness model, one of the oldest in CMC research, was criticised a lot due to its generalisation, Sproull and Kiesler (1991) introduced the Reduced Social Cues model, which concerns the loss of social cues using text-based CMC and its negative consequences, but is much more focused on the interactions between people, instead of the medium. Thurlow et al. (2004) define these social cues as:

> "either static (e.g. clothing and hairstyle) or dynamic (e.g. facial expressions and gestures) and communicate a sense of status, power and leadership. They also include back channels ('feedback noises') like uh-huh and yeah which help to show that you are listening or that you have a turn in the conversation." (Ibid, p. 60)

Sproull and Kiesler (1991) argue that the absence of these social cues leads to conversations that are more difficult to handle. Baym (2010, p. 52) contends that "we rely on gestures to keep our audience tuned in and to illustrate our words". The reduction of social cues makes it harder to feel that there is a real person at the other side of the computer network. The result is a communication that is, again, more task-orientated, less social and with this uninhibited, which means that the sender is more likely to express his or her real thoughts and feelings, even if they are hurtful for the receiver (Kiesler et al., 1985; Thurlow et al., 2004). Thus, this may open the door for conversations that are more aggressive because people think they can communicate the way they want.

However, according to Sassenberger and Jonas (2007), CMC researchers neither found any evidence that computer mediation reduces self-awareness nor that it leads to more extreme behaviour. Computers might not be the (only) reason for a lack of inhibition. What might also count are the social standards and – much more importantly for PR in social media – experience gained using and communication through CMC (Thurlow et al., 2004).

2.4.3.4. The Media Richness Model (Information Richness Theory)

One of the most influential theories of CMC in mediated communication is the media richness model (also known as information richness theory) introduced by Draft and Lengel (1984). They define media richness as:

> "the potential information-carrying capacity of data. If the communication of an item of data, such as a wink, provides substantial new understanding, it would be considered rich. If the datum provides little understanding, it would be low in richness." (Draft and Lengel, 1984, p. 196)

Following Baym (2010), Thurlow et al. (2004) and Draft and Lengel (1986), the exact amount of richness depends on the bandwidth of transferable (multiple) cues, the ability to give immediate feedback, the language variety (natural, conversational) and the personal focus a medium is able to transmit. Thus, it is argued that to be able to grasp CMC, it is important to understand the informational nature of a computer-mediated practice – essentially how high or low in richness it might be. The richest form, face-to-face communication, enables us to use words, vocal cues (e.g. voice inflection, sighs, paralanguage), nonverbal communication and written or drawn communication (e.g. blackboards) and is the perfect channel for complex, ambiguous messages on the one hand (Misoch, 2006) and personal, intimate messages on the other (Thurlow et al., 2004). CMC is thus better used and more effective for simple messages.

In contrast, this does not necessarily mean that CMC is always the least effective kind of communication one could choose. Following O'Sullivan (2000), CMC can help us to avoid showing nervousness by sending a short email, for example. So 'lean media' and tools like Facebook may sometimes be a more effective option for the sender. Additionally, experiences with different media play an important role. Dennis and Kinney (1998), for instance, found that users who are familiar with communicating online rate CMC as being richer than those who aren't. It all depends on the individual, subjective opinion (Misoch, 2006). Thus media richness could link directly to the problem of understanding text-only communication discussed in section 3.4.

2.4.3.5. The Social Information Processing Model

The four (early) models and theories of CMC presented above have one thing in common: they all are what scholars (e.g. Thurlow et al., 2004; Fischer, 2005; Misoch, 2006) call deficit approaches and assume CMC to be less social and less rich. But as mentioned earlier, much of the interpretation of CMC depends on user experience. This is what concerns the Social Information Processing Model. It focuses on the question of how people are using CMC to communicate online in their daily lives (van Dijk, 2012). It is not a theoretical approach but explores, rather, CMC practice (Thurlow, 2004).

Walther (1992, p. 67) assumes that individuals learn how to use different media – and how to compensate for their weaknesses - employing the given tools in a creative way. In the case of CMC and its lack of transmission of nonverbal cues, he argues that "users adapt their remaining communicative cues – language and textual display – to the process of relational management".

Consequently, we are able to transfer content that we would usually convey during a face-to-face conversation, for example non-verbal cues, by using the given possibilities, for example the computer's keyboard. Aside from that, more experience in using CMC will lead to a better ability to use it in ways that are closer to face-to-face communication (Misoch, 2006).

What is important for gaining these abilities is the factor of time (Walther, 1992; Turlow, 2004). While CMC is a form of communication that is very poor in quality when used short-term, it increases in richness over time and experience, such that:

> "Over time, computer mediation should have very limited effects on relational communication, as users process the social information exchange via CMC. [...] Although CMC may not be as efficient [as face-to-face], however, there is less reason to think it may not be as effective when time is not of the essence." (Walther, 1992, p. 80)

In addition, Thurlow (2004) follows Walther (1992) in arguing that our pursuit of affection is the same online as offline. It all might just take a little bit longer online than offline. Thus, in the sense of the Information Processing Model, emotions are possible when using computer-mediated communication ¬¬– but only if we have the time to develop and learn new skills and the creative usage of technologies, for example our computer's keyboard. With time, we get used to CMC ¬– and learn how to verbalise and interpret relational content (Walther, 1992).

2.5. Language Practice: Online and in an SNS Environment

Following the Social Information Processing Model, with experience social conversations are seen as possible using computer-mediated communication – and during the last two decades humans who have used computers and other digital devices to communicate with others have gained a lot of experience in how to use the given conditions to build friendly conversations.

Since it is the purpose of this dissertation to focus on online language and explore how users want to be adressed by PR communications on Facebook, it is important to know how language is generally used online and how the Internet might have influenced the way we communicate with each other. All this will be discussed within the following sections.

2.5.1. Warming Up CMC: The Creative Use of Keyboards

As noted above, during the early days of the Internet researchers struggled with the idea that there was no way of transmitting nonverbal, emotional cues within CMC. According to Thurlow et al. (2004)

> "it's all about making the most of what's available to foster a warm, friendly atmosphere. (...) In other words, in spite of the apparent coldness of CMC because of its lack of nonverbal and social cues, users eventually start to 'warm up' CMC by substituting other cues and reading existing cues more carefully." (Ibid, p. 52)

During the last few years, users of new online language have formed their own rules – and got very creative in finding ways to compensate for parts of the missing social cues in text-based computer-mediated communication. In fact, the only means they had to encode their messages and communicate with one another online were their computer keyboards. Unlike the early theorists of CMC assumed, for some of the early adopters these keyboards were enough to express parts of their – formerly only face-to-face expressed – feelings online. Without the invention of technologies such as picture, audio and video chat, users found ways to make social, friendly and emotional conversations possible online – and at least in part as rich as FtF communication (Derks, Bos & Grumbkow, 2007).

2.5.1.1. Emoticons

According to Mehrabian (1968) and Misoch (2006), 55 percent of our communication takes the form of body language. Thus facial expressions and gestures – our visual cues – are the most important factor that helps us to communicate messages and interpret each other correctly. The researcher agrees that these visual cues allow us to express personal opinions, attitudes and emotions and to build a social relationship during a conversation (Crystal, 2011).

> "Emotional expression, as it happens at a certain place in the interaction, is a function of underlying emotions and display rules specifying what expressions are socially appropriate in a given situation." (Derks, Bos & Grumbkow, 2007, p. 844)

To compensate for the lack of these visual, emotional signals and to make CMC slightly richer, Scott E. Fahlman introduced a combination of keyboard characters and punctuation marks that are nowadays known as emoticons (Baym, 2010). These emoticons, a neologism out of the words 'emotion' and 'icon', were then a new way to communicate our emotions and feelings while typing a message into the keyboard, for example by combining a right parenthesis, a hyphen and a colon like this :-) to mark a smiling face/joke or a left parenthesis, a hyphen and a colon like this :-(to mark a sad, unhappy face that lets the receiver know that you don't like what you have written or read within the text-based conversation (Crystal, 2006; Baym, 2010; Thurlow et al., 2012). The emoticons, in reference to the most popular smiling face also called 'smileys', also make it possible to use and mark tricky and difficult messages, such as sarcasm, that used to be more complicated in text-based CMC before the introduction of emoticons (Baym, 2010). According to van Dijk (2012), emoticons have become one of the standards to show and use paralanguage in online communication – and the users of these emoticons have been very creative in developing additional ones. Baym (2010) contends that a function that displays a drawn version of the emoticon typed into the keyboard (changing a simple :-) into this: □) has been integrated into new online CMC technologies and tools. Crystal (2011) shows that there were commonly more than 60 different emoticons implemented into and offered by some message exchange systems on the web in 2011 – while the total number of possible smileys used online might be a lot higher, with hundreds of possibilities listed by some Internet dictionaries.

In a study on the usage of Instant Messaging between American undergraduate students in spring 2003, Baron (2008) found that females were a lot more likely to use emoticons than males. Three quarters of the 16 females that participated in the study inserted at least one or more emoticons in a typical message, whereas only one out of six males did so. Crystal (2011), on the other hand, notes that the usage of emoticons might not only depend on gender, but also on age and the nature of the communicative output, for example a formal or informal motivation for communicating. The latter was proved during a study conducted by Derks, Bos, Jasper and Grumbkow (2007) in 2004. They were interested in the influence of the social context on the use of emoticons in Internet communication – and found that the usage of emoticons is a lot higher within a socio-emotional context than within a task-oriented one.

> "The overall conclusion (...) is that social context matters in CMC. Generally spoken, the expression of emoticons in CMC, by use of emoticons, is similar to the expressions of face-to-face communication." (Ibid, p. 847)

Baym (2010) argues that emoticons have not completely solved the problem of missing visual cues using CMC – but they have made things easier and help users to understand and interpret each other the right way while communicating online.

2.5.1.2. Abbreviations and Acronyms

Emoticons are not the only way people convey nonverbal social cues online. Apart from the creative use of punctuation marks, abbreviations and acronyms – both shortened forms of words and phrases – have also found their way into the vocabulary of the Internet (Baym, 2010; Crystal, 2011). Following Jones and Schieffelin (2009) abbreviations can be differentiated into three types: initialism (usage of initial letters to stand for entire words, with every letter pronounced separately, like brb for be right back); omission of nonessential letters (especially vowels, like lv for love) and substitution of homophones (like b4 for before). Acronyms, on the other hand, are a subspecies of abbreviations related to initialism but with the difference that they are read and pronounced like a word (like lol for laughing out loud).

Although all these kinds of abbreviations are used online for several reasons, they are not a new phenomenon in human communication. Crystal (2011) argues that some of them have been used for a few hundred years.

> "Adults who condemn a 'c u' in a young person's texting have forgotten that they once did the same thing themselves when they played word games. (...) People have been initializing common phrases for ages. IOU is recorded from 1618. There is no difference, apart from the medium of communication, between a modern kid's lol ('laughing out loud') and an earlier generation's SWALK ('sealed with a loving kiss'). (Ibid, p. 5)

The reasons for the usage of these abbreviations vary. Baym (2010) and Jones & Schieffelin (2009) note that some of them replace nonverbal social cues and construct sociality – while others are simply a way to speed up the online conversation and react more quickly (Werry, 1996).

> "Factors such as screen size, average typing speed, minimal response times, competition for attention, channel population and the pace of channel conversations all contribute to the emergence of certain characteristic properties. Some of the most obvious of these properties involve a tendency toward brevity which manifests itself in speaking turns of very short length, various forms of abbreviation, and the use of stored linguistic formulas." (Werry, 1996, p. 53)

Moreover, according to Crystal (2011), the creative use of single letters, numerals and symbols, such as writing 2 instead of 'to', b instead of 'be' and brb instead of 'be right back', are the most noticeable feature of using the computer keyboard in order to save space – not only in text messages but also – for example – in a Twitter post.

All together, emoticons and abbreviations have one goal: building a friendly conversation on the Internet (Baym, 2010). But again, all this is only working if both sender and receiver are able to encode and decode these emoticons and abbreviations in the same way. Jones & Schieffelin (2009) mention a humorous US TV ad by AT&T Wireless where this interpretation is not working: a mother tried to communicate with her daughter via text using the abbreviation AYL, which she thought would be understood as "Are you listening?" She assumed that CMC and abbreviations are all about initialism, but unfortunately her daughter did not understand the message AYL – and the communication failed.

2.5.2. Online Language: Hybrid between Text and Speech

Emoticons and abbreviations are key characteristics of CMC but it is also important to explore the usage of written words and language online. As explained in section 2.4, the understanding of a written text depends foremost on the interpretation of the reader based on his or her own experiences and historically learned rules. These experiences lead us to expect different kinds of language and written structure in a textbook compared to a news article, for example. In other words, different genres are learned – and with this the way we interpret language differently based on the channel that is used to receive the message. Thus, no matter what medium is chosen to communicate in/with, what is important is that the sender meets the receiver's expectations to make the interpretation as easy as possible.

The reader has learned to expect a certain style of language in certain contexts. Moreover, although CMC is not as old as all the other forms of communication, it still had enough time to form its own communicative styles and rules (Crystal, 2011). Like newspapers established their then new varieties of language decades ago, such as news articles, so the Internet did, too. Emails, blog posts, chat messages, tweeting – all of these comprise a new tone and a new style of language (Baron, 2008; Crystal, 2011). And according to Crystal (2011),

> "it is not always easy to use language clearly and effectively on the Internet. The interaction between sender and receiver is different from traditional conversations." (Ibid, p. 7)

According to Baym (2010), one of the main problems for digital communication is that its language usage neither works like spoken face-to-face nor like traditionally written language. Due to the point that CMC brought its very own, new characteristics – like synchronous communication that is text-based – CMC in its early days was something of a new form of communication. While Crystal (2011) calls this language of the Internet simply 'Internet linguistic', Baym (2010) and Thurlow et al. (2012) list several expressions that others have used to describe CMC's language: e-talk, netspeak, netlingo, wired-style, weblish, interactive written register, a hybrid, a creole or an uncooked linguistic stew – whereas Baym herself calls the Internet's language simply a mixed modality,

> "that blends elements of writing and oral language with features that are distinctive to this medium, or at least more common online than in any other language medium"(Ibid, p. 63).

Whatever it is called, the Internet has been argued to take the form of a hybrid between spoken and written language. In the days before computers became a tool for daily human communication it was very easy to separate spoken and written language. According to Crystal (2011),

> "Speech is time bounded, dynamic, and transient; it is part of an interaction in which both participants are usually present, and the speaker has a particular addressee (or several addressees) in mind. Writing is space bounded, static, and permanent; it is the result of a situation in which the writer is usually distant from the reader, and often does not know who the reader is going to be." (Ibid, p. 17)

In order to separate these two, traditional forms of communication, time delay plays an important role. In a spoken conversation, whether face-to-face or via telephone, there is no time lag at all between the sender and receiver. One says something, the other hears it and is able respond directly and quickly. In contrast, traditional written language works differently. There is no opportunity to ask questions or to react spontaneously (Baym, 2010; Crystal, 2011).

But through computer-mediated communication it is no longer straightforward to separate communication into these two traditional forms of language. Baym (2010) and Baron (2008) argue that, at first glance, online interaction is like writing in many ways with emails, instant messaging and text messages – all typed into a keyboard – looking more like a written text than a speech. The author of an article, a post or a message has some time to think about his words and is able to edit them before pushing return, often without the exact knowledge of who the reader will be. Like in a newspaper article, the messages and posts are often read with a time lag and physically separated from the reader. All these factors make CMC initially seem to be just like every other kind of written language. But Baym et al. (2010) argue that computer-mediated communication has some characteristics that are typical of speech. Using Facebook and other SNS to communicate with one another, the reader of a message is able to respond directly and within seconds, asking questions about the received message or answering it. Within this interaction, topics might change rapidly (Baym, 2010).

Crystal (2011) summarises the speech-like characteristics of CMC stating that online messages

> "are time governed, expecting or demanding an immediate response; they are transient, in the sense that messages may be immediately deleted (as in emails) or be lost to attention as they scroll off the screen (as in chatgroups);

> and their utterances display much of the urgency and energetic force which is characteristic of face-to-face conversation" (Ibid, p. 20).

Additionally, SNS like Twitter and Facebook limit the space for writing messages, which sometimes leads to a written language that sounds more like a spoken one. In an Instant Messaging (IM) study of 23 conversations between male and female, Baron (2008) found that the average transmission of messages typed was 5.4 words long - which is less than in an informal spoken conversation (6.2 words) or a written letter (8.4 words).

There are arguments for putting online communication under the microscope of both written and spoken language. However, Baym (2010) and Crystal (2011, 2006) argue that online communication is a mixed modality that shares some features with written and some with spoken language, while Crystal (2011, 2006) summarises this thought by saying that this hybrid can be seen as a new species of communication because with emoticons, for example, online language has introduced its own, unique facets that have not been used in traditional written language and obviously not in spoken language either.

The question then arises of what this new form of language means for the usage and the interpretation of the actual language used online. Besides the length of messages mentioned earlier, one of the main changes is that the Internet itself has helped text-based communication to develop a renaissance (Misoch, 2006). What was earlier done via telephone can now be done via IM, Facebook and other new communication technologies. This change has led to a written online language that sometimes uses elements like "ooops", "yeah" and "ugh" that originate from our oral, verbal repertoire. What is important to mention at this point is that users of CMC understand that these elements are not always the right thing to use in every online situation. Baym (2010), Crystal (2011) and Thurlow et al. (2012) argue that there is no general, standardised digital language – it always depends on the channel that is being used, the purpose and topic of the communication, the target group or participants and the personal style of the author (or the company) in using language online.

What the Internet does in general is to speed up the normal development of language. Our human language has never been carved in stone. Every new communication technology has brought with it new words and new ways to use these words and our language – and social changes have always influenced language use. Thus, according to Baron (2008, p. 171) "computers are not the cause of contemporary language attitudes and practices but, like signal boosters, they magnify ongoing trends". Baron argues that one of these (cultural) trends might be that spelling and punctuation are not as important online as they are offline. In addition to that, the formal language that our parents once taught us is partly gone in an online context.

Vital is, again, the understanding and correct interpretation of the receiver. While the creative usage of keyboards, the typing of emoticons and abbreviations mentioned earlier, might bring back some social cues and help us to interpret each other correctly, the right choice of words is still a problem. Van Dijk (2012) and Baym (2010) both argue that people are still not sure what style and what kind of words – and with this what kind of language – is appropriate in CMC, whether for private means or for business. Following van Dijk (2012),

> "formal and informal, public and intimate messages run side by side. People do not yet know how to exchange greetings and other courtesies. The right mixture of politeness and efficiency (speed) is not easily achieved." (Ibid, p. 260)

According to Crystal (2011), words and language are different on a digital screen – and it is important for all of us to learn more about the aforementioned strengths and risks of CMC. However, the rules of how to use language correctly using CMC are still in development and this is the same process our language has gone through with every new communication technology (Baron, 2008).

Nevertheless, users have started to gain experience in how to communicate online in a way that is interpreted right by each other. While text-based language had some kind of a renaissance in CMC – and is applied in a slightly different way than it used to – emoticons and abbreviations help us to handle the missing social cues in text-based computer-mediated communication. Following Crystal (2006), it is remarkable

> "that so many people have learned so quickly to adopt their language to meet the demands of the new situations, and to exploit the potential of the new medium so creatively to form new areas of expression. It has all happened within a few decades." (Ibid, p. 276)

According to Lipschultz (2015), users of both the Internet and social networking sites began to use online communication and language in ways reminiscent of face-to-face communication. However, the question arises of how PR professionals might communicate in a way that is interpreted in the way they really meant in an environment that is still new to them and to their audience.

By 'new' the researcher means a) a new communication environment for PR professionals with accompanying challenges for communication practice and b) an environment in which PR communication practice is still some kind of a new experience for an intended audience.

It has been argued that professionals need to understand how electronically mediated communication works (Crystal, 2011). Baym (2010) contends that they should also have in their minds that there is no general 'digital language' to learn (2010). Online communication is culturally informal (Baron, 2008). Evans, Twomey and Talan (2011) advocate that PR professionals in organisations should not use corporate language. It might depend on an organisation's communicative goal, its requested public image and its target group on how formal their use of online language should be. However, such considerations are important as it has been suggested that performing well and using a proper language in an online environment "can bring (...) recognition, or at least lead to a sense that there is a real person behind otherwise anonymous text" (Baym, 2010, p. 62).

2.6. Summary and Conclusion

It was the purpose of this chapter to give a theoretical background to the concept of communication with and without the web. Section 3.2 started with a general overview on theories and previous findings on the process of human communication – with a special focus on the factors that influence the interpretation of communication and a concluding part on text-based communication. The following section 3.3 then dealt with the effects that computers had (and might still have) while being used as a channel for communication. In summary, computer-mediated communication has some advantages for both sender and receiver, but was considered disadvantageous especially in the early usage days when it was seen as cold, formal and unfriendly compared to FtF communication. The concluding section of this chapter then dealt with the influence CMC had on the language practice – discussing the creative usage of the computer keyboard to invent and use emoticons and abbreviations in order to compensate for missing cues and answering the question of whether or not online language can be seen as a hybrid of text and speech. Some newer studies gave interesting findings on the usage of online language – but there are still some key questions open for PR professionals who engage within social networks, for example:

- What are the scope and limits of SNS for PR?
- Should PR professionals make use of CMC language, including abbreviations and emoticons?
- How would the audiences, the users who engage with PR communications via Facebook, see this usage of CMC language and emoticons?
- Do PR professionals use language and words within SNS that the user expected them to use?

Miller et al. (1998) argue that

> "it is impossible to determine how people will understand or interpret a text simply by analysing the content; it is necessary to examine the responses of actual audiences" (Ibid, p. 10).

Bearing this in mind, the next chapter will focus on the process of finding answers to these questions, introducing the research process and presenting the general method of data collection for the fieldwork and data analysis afterwards.

3. The Research Process

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the overall research design of this study with a particular focus on the methods chosen and utilised. After a brief introduction to the general philosophical approach adopted in this research, the chapter discusses the two paradigms used in most scientific research studies: positivism and interpretivism. The chapter proceeds with a section on the chosen research methodology, explaining the origins, development and key elements of the grounded theory methodology, including a critical discussion of the two schools of grounded theory. Subsequently, the chapter presents in detail how the researcher collected data primarily using qualitative, semi-structured interviews, conducting theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation, in the process. The chapter next explains the step-by-step process of analysing the data gathered and the building of theory following the unique features of Strauss' (1990) version of grounded theory. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical issues.

3.2. Research Philosophy

Before starting the research process and setting up a methodology, every researcher must consider carefully the philosophical approach to be adopted in the research, in particular the paradigmatic beliefs that will automatically affect the whole research (Bailey, 2007). According to Thomas (2013), the word paradigm was used and introduced by scientist Thomas Kuhn back in 1970 to refer to "a fixed set of assumptions about the way inquiry should be conducted" (Thomas, 2013, p. 106), choosing the word paradigm with reference to the Greek word paradeigma, which means 'an unchanging model' (Ibid).

Today, paradigms can be seen as "a way of shared assumptions or ways of thinking about some aspects of the world" (Oates, 2006, p. 282) or, more broadly, a general worldview (Creswell, 2009). While one of the most cited scientific definitions is from Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 157), who describe this paradigmatic worldview as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action", these paradigms decide how one looks at the world, about the researcher's place in it and how everything is connected within this world (Bailey, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

It has been argued that the concept of scientific paradigms that guides the researcher is mainly concerned with three questions: the **ontological question** about the nature of the world, the **epistemological question** about the way we gain knowledge about it (Oates, 2006) and the **methodological question** about procedures for understanding the world (Bailey, 2007) – which are shown and explained in more detail in table 3.1.

3.1. Fundamental Questions: Determining Inquiry Paradigms

1. **The ontological question.** What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it? For example, if a "real" world is assumed, then what can be known about it is "how things really are" and "how things really work." Then only those questions that relate to matters of "real" existence and "real" action are admissible; other questions, such as those concerning matters of aesthetic or moral significance, fall outside the realm of legitimate scientific inquiry.
2. **The epistemological question.** What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known? The answer that can be given to this question is constrained by the answer already given to the ontological question; that is, not just any relationship can now be postulated. So if, for example, a "real" reality is assumed, then the posture of the knower must be one of objective detachment or value freedom in order to be able to discover "how things really are" and "how things really work."
3. **The methodological question.** How can the enquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known? Again, the answer that can be given to this question is constrained by answers already given to the first two questions; that is, not just any methodology is appropriate. For example, a "real" reality pursued by an "objective" inquirer mandates control of possible confounding factors, whether the methods are qualitative (say, observational) or quantitative (say, analysis of covariance).

(Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 108)

In research, there are two main philosophical approaches employed in western traditions: positivism and interpretivism (Galliers, 1991). Thomas (2013) argues that despite the early dominance of positivism, today, "the two paradigms, positivism and interpretivism, are coexisting with each other – each recognised as having its own part to play in social inquiry" (Thomas, 2013, p. 106). Oates (2006) argues that both could be further divided into sub-categories, but

> "a broad-brush approach is sufficient to highlight the main features of each paradigm and demonstrate that different research communities share different assumptions about the nature of reality, the purpose of research and what counts as knowledge" (Ibid, p. 283).

3.2.1. Positivism

The scientific paradigm positivism refers to a worldview in which everything around us can be measured and observed from an objective and independent viewpoint (Levin, 1988; Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, for positivistic researchers knowledge is only true if it can be measured and tested in numbers. Positivism is often seen as the core of scientific research (especially in the field of natural science), the most scientific form of doing research and the only 'correct' way of understanding the world (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Bailey, 2007).

Dörnyei (2007) argues that the positivistic researcher should be able to do empirical research using scientific instruments that are standardised.

While positivism is typically used in quantitative research, some researchers even believe that it is the only way of doing scientific research the 'right' way (Oates, 2006; Bailey, 2007). Referring to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) and Thomas (2013), the roots of positivism go back to the French philosopher Auguste Comte, who in 1956 "suggested that the most advanced form of thinking was the scientific form" (Ibid, p. 107).

Oates (2006) refers to two basic assumptions that underlay this scientific form: (1) "Our world is ordered and regular, not random" and (2) "we can investigate it randomly" (Ibid, p. 283). According to Bailey (2007), this

> "process of scientific discovery begins with a theory. Using deductive logic, the researcher derives a testable hypothesis from the theory. Then data are collected to test the hypothesis. On the basis of the results of the data analysis, the researcher decides whether there is empirical support for the hypothesis." (Ibid, p. 51)

All this, which Thomas (2013) and Oates (2006) call the 'scientific method', should be done with an external view from outside. During the research process, the positivistic researcher should be as neutral as possible, ensuring that no action is taken that could affect and influence the findings – based on an objective view from the outside (Thomas, 2013; Willig, 2001) According to Denzin (2001) positivism assumes that

- “Objective reality can be captured
- The observer can be separated from what is observed
- Observations and generalizations are free from situational and temporal constraints; that is, they are universally generalizable
- causality is linear, and there are no causes without effects and no effects without causes
- Inquiry is value-free” (Ibid, p. 44)

It is the overall aim of positivism “to find the universal laws, patterns and regularities” (Oates, 2006, p. 284) and, as the goal of a positivist epistemology, to produce knowledge that is objective. (Willig, 2001)

As a result of all of this, the positivistic researcher sees the world as “the one that is ‘out there’“ (Thomas, 2013, p. 108), without personal involvement (Willig, 2001) and nearly no space for interpreting it – which is one of the main reasons why positivists are often criticised by qualitative researchers (Thomas, 2013). While Oates (2006) refers to the fact that positivism is a very well known, traditional philosophical approach that is especially helpful for researchers who are studying and doing research in physics, biology and other natural sciences, he also claims that positivism is often hard to use in scientific research projects that deal with the social world. Social science researchers in particular who are interested in groups and individuals, in cultures, in people and the relationships between them and the ways “they think of, and act in, their world” (Ibid, p. 283) are often not well advised to use a positivistic approach. As Oates (2006) points out:

> “In the social world, different people see their worlds differently, and their views and perceptions can change over time. From the late 19th century onwards, researchers have therefore developed alternative research paradigms to the scientific method and positivism, in order to research into people and their worlds.” (Ibid, p. 289)

According to Galliers (1991) the main alternative approach to research in western scientific tradition with a standard qualitative underpinning is interpretivism.

3.2.2. Interpretivism

As noted earlier in this chapter, each philosophical approach, each paradigm, has its very own view of the world and of how to gain knowledge of this world. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) state that

> “All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Some beliefs may be taken for granted, invisible, only assumed, whereas others are highly problematic and controversial.” (Ibid, p. 22)

Positivism, whilst a very well known way of philosophically framing research “about the natural world we live in” (Oates, 2006, p. 291), has, nevertheless, clear limitations when it comes to feelings, relationships and social aspects of our human lives (Oates, 2006; Thomas, 2013). In contrast, interpretivists are much more focused on the subjective interpretation of the world – especially at a point where humans are involved in research (Bailey, 2007). Interpretivism is concerned with understanding the social process of what is happening (Oates, 2006), and argues that humans are constantly constructing our social world. This world is “different for each of us” (Thomas, 2013, p. 108), and “there is no single version of ‘the truth’“ (Oates, 2006, p. 292). Corbetta (2003) argues that, for an interpretivist, a universal reality does not exist – it all depends on the understanding and interpretation of the involved humans and the researcher. According to Bailey (2007),

> “Research undertaken with an interpretative paradigm in mind focuses on social relationships, as well as the mechanisms and processes through which members in a setting navigate and create their social worlds. Thus, the researcher using an interpretative paradigm asks what kind of things people do, how they do them, what purpose activities serve, and what they mean to the participants. In other words, the researcher becomes interested in the meanings, symbols, beliefs, ideas, and feelings given or attached to objectives, events, activities, and others by participants in the setting.” (Ibid, p. 53)

All this is done by pursuing what Oates (2006) calls “dynamic, socially constructed meaning”. Communication is always a complex system based on (1) a shared understanding of words and nonverbal signs that we all have learned during our life and (2) putting these words and signs into their social context. The result is meaning that could be very different across groups.

Thomas (2013) adds that all these social aspects cannot be studied in ways a positivistic researcher, for example in the natural sciences, would use. Rather,

> “we have to look closely at what people are doing by using our own selves, our own knowledge of the world as people. We have to immerse ourselves in the research context in which we are interested – for example, talking to people in depth, attending to every nuance of their behaviour, every clue to the meanings that they are investing in something. So we attend to their blinks, winks, hums and hahs, their nods and nose-blowings, as well as listening to the actual words that are coming out of their mouths. The key is understanding. What understandings do the people we are talking to have about the world, and how can we in turn understand these?” (Ibid, p. 109)

Interpretative research is therefore never fully neutral, which means that the researcher is indeed more of a participant, trying to do the best in understanding and interpreting the vis-à-vis, but this interpretation is the researcher’s very own version of the truth.

However, Oates (2006,p. 293) notes the possibility of studying “people in their natural setting” as one of the main opportunities afforded by interpretative research.

It provides the researcher with the chance to access people's worlds to understand research subjects in-depth. (Thomas, 2013)

The aforementioned potential lack of objectivity in adopting an interpretivist approach needs to be acknowledged since every researcher might interpret empirical data gathered differently, for example. As a consequence of this interpretative process, the results of this research project, which adopts an interpretivist stance, are the individual results of the interpretation of the researcher, meaning that this researcher acknowledges at the outset that his use of an interpretivist approach will entail personal interpretation of data gathered. Stokes (2003) notes that interpretivists acknowledge this limitation and do not claim to be all-knowing and as objective as positivistic researchers.

In addition, Dörnyei (2007) stated that there are many different ways of interpreting a qualitative dataset and that it is the researcher who chooses how to interpret and understand the data. In the words of Miles and Hubermann (1994, p. 7), "the researcher is essentially the main "measurement device" in the study" – and the results are his or her results based on an interpretation of the data.

To judge the quality of interpretative research and avoid the allegation of bias and objectivity, Oates (2006) argues that securing the plausibility of both the findings and their interpretation should be the overall objective of the interpretative researcher.

> "Rather than 'proof' in the positivist sense, interpretive researchers aim for plausibility. They are similar to lawyers in a court. Both interpretive researchers and lawyers have to make arguments and convince their audience (readers or the jury) that their descriptions, explanations and interpretations are plausible and supported by evidence (data). In both cases, that evidence can compromise

> data generated from interviews, observations, questionnaires and documents. Lawyers have to explain how the evidence was acquired and consider whether it might have been tainted in any way; interpretative researchers also have to explain how their data was gathered and reflect on how they themselves may have affected the data." (Ibid, p. 296)

While personal reflection will be part of the discussion of this thesis, the explanation of how data was gathered and analysed will be discussed in the next sections of this chapter.

3.3. Research Methods

Besides the interpretive approach, grounded theory research was used in this study to explore and understand the experiences and wishes of different Facebook users. As part of that, qualitative, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method for data collection, while an analysis of the current literature and an accompanied analysis of Facebook posts the interviewees were talking about and that were taken within the interview process complemented the process. Concerning the analysis, grounded theory analysis following the approach of Strauss and Corbin was used to build a theory from the gathered data, as will be discussed in more detail in section 3.3.3.

The term qualitative in this research is an "umbrella term used to refer to a complex and evolving research methodology" (Croker, 2009, p. 5) Interpretative, qualitative researchers are more concerned with the nature and significance of meaning rather than quantitative measurement (Willig, 2001). They are interested in how people experience things and about how this experience affects their interpretation of the world. (Willig, 2001) "Qualitative researchers go to the people; they do not extricate people from their everyday worlds" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 9) but interview them in the real-world settings they are used to. (Willig, 2001)

It is the aim of this research to focus on the language expectations of Facebook users' and examine how they want to be addressed in the context of PR within the social networking site. The objective therefore is to develop a theoretical understanding of what characteristics affect the user's interpretation and judgement whether a PR professional has used the right language and phraseology on Facebook. As this interpretation and communication in general are social activities done by humans in their everyday worlds, an interpretative approach employing qualitative methodology was seen as the most effective way to provide the richest possible contribution to knowledge on the subject.

3.3.1. Grounded Theory Research

Grounded theory methodology (GTM) has been chosen to address the objectives of this research. Drawing on the perspective of Goulding (1998), it is considered to be potentially efficacious given the interpretative approach underlying this study and its focus on language and interpretation, in particular.

> "Grounded theory is a methodology that has been used to generate theory where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge. It is an interpretivist mode of enquiry which has its roots in symbolic interactionism and as such language, gestures, expressions and actions are all considered primary to the experience." (Ibid, p. 51ff)

Despite the fact that it is generally possible to use grounded theory in quantitative research, its proponent researchers internationally have mostly agreed with Goulding, contending that grounded theory is most insightful in qualitative research (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Goulding, 1998; Charmaz, 2006; Urquhart, 2013).

The founders of grounded theory – Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss – wanted to develop a way of doing qualitative research that produces findings and theories that are as scientifically well-grounded as quantitative ones. With the publication of their book 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research' in 1967 they introduced the first approach in qualitative research that "had been sufficiently elaborate and procedurally rigorous enough to withstand the criticisms of quantitative scholars" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 259).

Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) – who later teamed up with Juliette Corbin – defined the grounded theory approach as "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Ibid, p. 21). After many years of experience of scholarly use of GTM, Charmaz (2005) referred to grounded theory methods as:

> "a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development." (Ibid, p. 507)

Oates (2006), on the other hand, emphasises that:

> "Grounded theory is a particular approach to qualitative research where the intention is to do field research and then analyse the data to see what theory emerges, so that the theory is grounded in the field data." (Ibid, p. 274)

This focus on the word 'grounded' is indeed an important reason why grounded theory is positioned as an inductive approach and indicates that the emerging theory comes directly from the field (Dörnyei, 2007; Willig, 2001). Following Payne (2007) it can be seen as a technique that focuses on a systematic interplay of data collection and data analysis whereby data collection can be done by a variety of different techniques, including all forms of interviews.

Like in any other grounded theory research, it is the goal of this study to generate a theoretical apparatus which assists in answering the research questions of the study (Birks & Mills, 2011). Creswell (2009) points out that, for Glaser and Strauss, the outcome in terms of theory should be a grounded and well-established explanation of a process that offers a clear understanding of a certain phenomenon. In the case of this thesis, it is an explanation of how users of Facebook decide whether or not they feel 'spoken to' by corporate posts within the SNS and how they judge this communication and the phraseology used in the posts.

While it is possible to use grounded theory in a positivistic research approach, it is more often and typically used in interpretative approaches like the one underlying this thesis – especially if done using the Strauss version of GTM (Oates, 2006; Jones & Alony, 2011)

3.3.1.1. The Two Schools of Grounded Theory

Both Glaser and Strauss wanted to provide a methodological way of doing qualitative research that could be as trustable as the then classical hypothetico-deductive approach in quantitative research where hypotheses were formulated and tested. However, their ideas of how to do grounded theory exactly have evolved into two different, distinct strands "as a result of a cataclysmic dispute" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 18) in 1990. The result is two schools of grounded theory, the Glaserian and the Straussian one (Ibid).

While Glaser and Strauss still agree on some important basic features like working with memos and categories (Willig, 2001; for more see chapter 3.3.3.), the Straussian coding process of the raw data is more detailed and involves the three phases (1) open coding, (2) axial coding and (3) selective coding. Glaser, on the other hand, disagrees with axial coding – mainly because he is tentative about 'forcing' a structure on the still raw data gathered. Instead, he uses coding families to group the findings of the first phase, which is also open coding, to reach the phase of selective coding (Flick, 2009; Urquhart, 2013). However, his argument of forcing can be avoided by staying open-minded during the process of analysis (see 3.3.1.5). After all, Jones and Alony (2011) argue that the two founders of grounded theory have separated and now have partially different ideas about the route grounded theory takes. Considering these differences, this thesis was designed adopting the 'school' and methodology of Strauss (and Corbin). This was done for several reasons. First, because the Straussian version allows one to have a general idea of where to begin (Jones & Alony, 2011). This means that concepts and theories on PR and communication were known by the researcher before getting into the field due to former research and study. Second, the coding process within the three Straussian phases mentioned above provide a structured and very useful context for understanding the data gathered in this research.

3.3.1.2. The Four Key Elements of Grounded Theory

Whatever school of grounded theory methodology is chosen, four core elements are always the same and attest that 1) the whole research is done using the umbrella of a grounded theory methodology and 2) that the outcome is indeed a grounded theory. Urquhart et al. (2010) found these four characteristics of GTM as follows:

3.1. The Four Key Characteristics of Grounded Theory
• The main purpose of GTM is *theory building* • As a general rule, researchers should make sure that they have no *preconceived theoretical ideas* before starting their research • Analysis and conceptualisation are engaged through the core process of *constant comparison,* where every slice of data is compared with all existing concepts and constructs, to see if it enriches an existing category (by adding to/enhancing its properties), forms a new one or points to a new relation • 'Slices of data' [simply meaning data] are selected by a process of *theoretical sampling*, where researchers decide, on analytical grounds, where to sample from next (Urquhart, 2013, p. 16)

Urquhart (2013) points out that this **theory building** was one of the main reasons why Glaser and Strauss developed the grounded theory method in the first place. They created a process which systematically leads to the generation and development of a theory that is grounded and offers an understanding of a certain process, helping to explain a certain phenomenon. To ensure that this theory is really grounded, the researcher should step into the research field and try to understand the context of a certain situation. In contrast, "researchers who leverage GTM only for coding procedure are ignoring the main purpose of the method" (Ibid, p. 16).

While the second condition – to have **no preconceived theoretical ideas** about the process and phenomenon being studied – will be part of the discussion in section 3.2.1.5, it originally (and especially in the Glaserian version of GTM) refers to the absence of doing an in-depth literature review before entering the field. However, nowadays it means, first and foremost, to stay open minded throughout the whole research process and to follow both the data and the emergence of the theory. (Urquhart, 2013)

Constant comparison, the third characteristic mentioned above, has been a standard process in other methods of social research before the introduction of GTM, but in GTM it is not only a standard, but also an important key of the method (Urquhart, 2013). Right from the start of data collection, the researcher starts to compare all data with each other, which means looking for similarities or differences, for example within the different answers of one interviewee or within the answers of different interviewees. This constant comparison goes on at all levels of analysis – open, axial and selective coding – until a theory is developed. (Charmaz, 2014)

The last key element mentioned by Urquhart et al., the **theoretical sampling** with all different kinds of 'slices of data', refers to the need to maintain the openness of the whole research process again where "different kinds of data give researchers different views" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 18) to develop a theory. This process of theoretical sampling will be discussed later in more detail. (See section 3.3.2.4)

3.3.1.5. Previous Knowledge: The Literature Review vs. "Open Mind"

The early usage of literature and especially the writing of a literature review in the initial stage of a grounded theory study, before entering the field and collecting new data, has led to many discussions within scientific research since this methodology was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (Strübing, 2014; Flick, 2013; Urquhart, 2012; Dunne, 2001; McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) The discussion around whether or not to start the research process with an initial literature review is first and foremost based on Glaser and Strauss's original advice to stay open minded during the process of data generation and analysis.

> "An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas." (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 37)

However, since this early advice scholars have criticised this point and called it scientifically untenable to ignore the literature before entering the field (e.g. Strübing, 2014). While Birks & Mills (2011) point out that even Glaser and Strauss did not deny that a "researcher will enter into a study with a broad range of knowledge about their proposed area of study" (Ibid, p. 22), it is especially Strauss who has rethought his first advice afters years of using GTM himself. Strauss, who has now teamed up with Corbin, began to see some benefit in reviewing the literature before entering the field. First, Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that especially in PhD studies a pre-literature review is often needed to satisfy a university's ethics committee. In addition, they see a necessity in having more than a 'general wonderment' of where to start with the research. "Familiarity with relevant literature can enhance sensitivity to subtle nuances in data, just as it can block creativity." (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 49)

Flick (2013) sees some first reading as a very helpful process for novice researchers in qualitative and grounded theory research, to provide the researcher with some kind of background. He also adds that it "has been a myth, which was produced by some writings of Glaser and Strauss" (Flick, 2013, p. 21) to start with a blank page and that we [the researchers] somehow "have to build on existing theories and results from empirical research, unless we want to risk being naive when starting our research" (Ibid). And even Urquhart (2013), who advocates the Glaserian school of

GTM that still stuggles with the ‘pre-reading’ of literature, acknowledges that every researcher has done or read something before that could affect the phenomenon being studied.

> “The founders of GTM ask that we put that aside, so we do not influence the coding of our data. In practice, it’s quite possible to do a literature review before we enter the field – on the understanding, though, that it does not influence the coding process.” (Urquhart, 2013, p. 7)

Following these points and the discussions and debates that evolved out of it through the years, it is not a question about whether or not to do a literature review before entering the field, but it is a question about openness and about the need of the researcher to stay open minded during the whole process of data collection and data analysis (Strübing, 2014) without having predefined hypotheses out of the literature review. Thus “the defining feature is that the grounded theory must arise inductively” (McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007, p. 341) and that the researcher is giving himself and the data the chance to emerge and to discover something interesting and new, “rather than shoehorn it into a theory that already exists” (Urquhart, 2013, p. 7).

As a result of all these points and some critical thinking around them, the researcher saw more benefits in completing a literature review before entering the empirical field in this project. Despite the fact that some concepts of public relations, social media and their effects on each other, and the basics of human communication, were known from previously undertaken research projects and previous university and professional experience, the researcher concurred with Birks and Mills (2011) that reading around the area of study provides a beneficial knowledge of what research has already been undertaken and which research questions have already been answered. Thus, before entering the field, the researcher read and reviewed the literature of online communication, CMC and digital PR to avoid being naive (Flick, 2013). To ensure that a pre-written literature review did not adversely affect the GT approach to data analysis and to adopt the important step of being open minded, none of the concepts from the literature were used within data collection, neither in the interview guide nor in the concrete interviews. Hypotheses and concepts were not built. And to stay open minded, the researcher let the interviewees – especially within the first interviews – decide where the flow of the interview will lead the discussion. As discussed in section 3.3.2.2., the interview guide had only some broad questions and topics on it to give the researcher some guidance. However, knowing some concepts out of the literature was helpful to the researcher to be sensitive about which answers, findings and routes could be of importance for the emergent theory and which are not. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) Most importantly, openness was seen as essential since the researcher was combining two fields that as far as he knows have not been combined before. Specifically there was no existing research to the best of the researcher's knowledge on how users of SNS are interpreting text-based online communication within a PR context.

3.3.4.6. Criticism

Like all research methodologies, GTM has been the subject of criticism. Dörnyei (2007) argues that GTM has become a banner under which nearly all qualitative research can be packed. However, for her, at least two basic criteria should be met. Firstly, data analysis should follow the unique and specific rules of grounded theory coding, using the coding system which will be discussed later. Secondly, the outcome of this analysis and the whole research process should be some kind of theory. Oates (2006) adds that this theory should have "practical relevance for the people in the situation studied" (Ibid, p. 275), which makes grounded theory especially relevant in research areas where practical issues are involved, like the subject of this research.

Willig (2001), on the other hand, does not criticise the grounded theory method in itself, but mentions the problematic process of making readable what someone said in an interview since "all types of transcription constitute a form of translation of spoken words into something else" (Ibid, p. 25) and might not mirror the exact meaning.

However, this point was not seen as problematic. First, because transcripts are a very common and very well used tool in qualitative research to make participants' words readable for other scholars. Moreover, like previous researchers in this field this researcher does not consider this to be an impediment to producing a contribution to knowledge since his study is done under the umbrella of an interpretative approach.

3.3.2. Data Collection

As mentioned earlier, the main method used to gain data for this grounded theory study was the collection of 15 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with willing participants who were more or less connected with organisational profiles in SNS and had some kind of experience in the usage of Facebook. The lengths of these interviews ranged from 41 to 87 minutes.

The following paragraphs provide details about the process of this data collection.

3.3.2.1. Qualitative, Semi-Structured Interviews

> "I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?" (Spradley, 1979, p. 34)

Although this quote is about 35 years old, it describes well the reason why so many qualitative researchers across all the different research areas are using in-depth interviews to collect their data and see them as one of the most powerful tools to understand human beings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). While Burges (1984, p. 102) describes the qualitative interview as a “conversation with a purpose”, interviews are also a key to look into other individuals’ lives, to explore what they think and what they care about; to give them a stage and show them that their stories and experiences count (Seidman, 2013). Qualitative interviews are interpersonal situations and a method of inquiry that makes meaning through the language of the interviewee while “knowledge is created “inter” the points of view of the interviewer and the interviewee” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 123).

Thus, Charmaz (2014) argues that intensive, in-depth qualitative interviews fit well with a grounded theory study because both “grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (Ibid, p. 85). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) refer to the introduction of Glaser and Strauss’s grounded theory method as one of the reasons why qualitative interviewing has become an increasingly employed and well accepted research method.

However, while all these points might have been enough to argue for the usage of qualitative interviews, there is another point that motivated the researcher to choose this form of data collection. As this research focuses on the human expectations and interpretations of text-based messages in a PR-driven social media environment, and as both communication and interpretation are social activities based on individual knowledge and experience, qualitative semi-structured interviews were seen as the appropriate method because they:

1. allowed the open-minded nature of grounded theory to be followed – for example of being open for new questions and topics that might occur during the interviews;
2. they gave the whole interview some structure (as will be discussed in the next sections) at the same time.

Since every user might interpret PR's messages differently, these qualitative semi-structured interviews were considered flexible enough to capture that breadth of user experience in the required depth.

There are essentially three types of possible in-depth interviews used by researchers all over the world – the structured interview, the unstructured or open interview and the semi-structured interview (Richards, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Whereas the first one is a form of spoken questionnaire with all its strengths and weaknesses, the open or unstructured interview focuses on exploring in "as much depth as possible the respondent's experiences, views, or feelings" while the interviewer only has broad topics in mind (Richards, 2009, p. 185). The third type, the semi-structured interview, is a combination of the other two. It was chosen as the best interview method for this research since it offered the researcher the surety of a clear structure in which to undertake fieldwork yet also meant the researcher was

> "prepared to allow the interview to develop in unexpected directions where these open up important new areas" (Richards, 2009, p. 186).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that the semi-structured interview is a viable way to attempt to understand the everyday world from the interviewee's own perspective.

> "It comes close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it has purpose and involves a specific approach and technique; it is semi-structured – it is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire." (Ibid, p. 27)

To ensure that nothing distracted the interviewees during this conversation and to make sure that they felt as comfortable as possible during the interview situation, all interviews were undertaken in an environment that the interviewees were used to (Birks & Mills, 2011), which was in almost all cases the interviewee's home (one interviewee wanted to meet in his office).

While interviewing, a MacBook – with WiFi and an additional 4G/LTE connection to the Internet – was used so that the interviewees were able to use their preferred social network, for example Facebook, to show what they are trying to explain. In addition to that, the MacBook was used to record and save the whole interview situation; not just the voices but also everything that happened on the MacBook's screen (for ethical considerations and data protection, see section 3.3.4.) so that there was the ability to go back to some posts that might be important for the researcher to explore during the analysis phase of the research. In addition, a second audio track was recorded with a voice recorder as a back up.

3.3.2.2. Interview Guide

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe an interview guide as a prepared script, which "structures the course of the interview more or less tightly" (Ibid, p. 130). Thus, before entering the field and starting the process of interviewing the participants, an interview guide was created to help focus on the research area, which enabled scheduling of the interview broadly to take place in advance, thus giving it structure. The purpose of this was to give the researcher some guidance while interviewing, but not to plan the accurate and exact course of the interview. Instead, the guide ensured that every research area was thematised, that the researcher had the correct and easy understandable wording for these areas and that the interviews were introduced appropriately to the interviewee (Dörnyei, 2007).

The interview guide (see Appendix A) that was used for this research contained the following sections and subject areas:

- **Opening ice-breaker question:**

  To make things easier for the interviewees and to give them a comfortable feeling about the interview setting, each interview situation was started with some spontaneous small talk about 'everyday' topics, such as the weather. As advised by Brennen (2012), each interview was then started with an 'Ice Breaker Question', a more general question that was expected to be answered very easily by the interviewee and that had a peripheral relevance to the research purpose. This question was: what would you say makes a good conversation for you? Besides the fact that actually every interviewee was easily able to answer this question, it additionally provided something that made the rest of the interview much easier for the researcher and more comfortable for the interviewee. Thanks to their individual answers, the researcher knew how to build a friendly conversation with them – and with that an atmosphere that had appropriate surrounding conditions for a qualitative, in-depth interview to achieve rich data responses.
- **Part 1: General talk about written communication within the SNS:**

  To expand slowly from general communication into the text-based communication within SNS, the researcher was first focused on the users' private communication within Facebook. He wanted to know how the interviewees were using Facebook to communicate with personal Facebook friends and if there is anything that is helping the interviewee to make this communication easier. The knowledge gained within this part of the interview was especially interesting at some later points of the interview while talking and comparing this private communication to the communication of organisations using Facebook.

- **Part 2: Scrolling through organisational Facebook posts:**

  After the first part, the interviewees were asked to scroll through some PR posts of companies that have a fanpage within Facebook. While the participants were asked to start with companies they already liked or expressed sympathy for, they were later asked to look at business rivals of these favourite organisations – to compare if the expectations differ. Following, most of the organisations that we looked at were chosen right within the interviews by the inteviewees (see Appendix E for a full list of organisations looked at). While there were multiple reasons to chose a certain company, for example looking at an organisation that an interviewee defined as a rather serious-minded company after scrolling through the posts of an organisation he or she did not, the choice was tied into reactions of companies – which is exactly what grounded theory is asking for.

  During this phase of the interview, the interviewees were asked to scroll through the posts, read them and talk about what they liked and what they did not like in matters of the post in general and especially about the language used. At this point, the researcher was first and foremost listening and asking clarifying questions.

- **Part 2.1: Focus on RQ1 and what language is needed to feel addressed:**

  After the interviewees had talked about some first posts, the focus was placed on questions and topics that are primarily related to the first research question, the participants' wish of how they want to be spoken to by public relations in a Facebook environment. The researcher asked questions concerning the phraseology, the amount of formality and about what helps the participant to judge whether or not the language chosen by the organisation feels right or wrong. At this point, the answers from the aforementioned discussion about private communication among personal friends within Facebook were very helpful to compare the private communication to the language and phraseology used in corporate posts.

- **Part 2.2: Focus on RQ2 and what affects the process of interpretation:**
  Here the researcher addressed questions and topics that are primarily related to the second research question. He was interested in what affects the participants' interpretation of the text within the post and in what might change the meaning of the written words. Additionally, he was trying to understand what helps to make the interpretation of certain posts easier. For example the participants were asked about the role of words chosen to say something and in later interviews about the role of emoticons and hashtags.
- **Summary of what is important in organisation posts**
  At this stage, the researcher wanted to examine what is generally important for the users if PR departments and organisations are using Facebook to talk directly to and with them. The researcher wanted to know what makes the perfect organisational post for the interviewees – and whether or not there is 'the perfect post'.

Although this pre-scheduled interview guide was used as an important tool to guide the interview, the questions and topics in this guide were not automatically thematised in the above order within each interview. Instead, the course given by the interviewee within the interview itself determined what was addressed at which point (Bailey, 2007).

Dörnyei (2007) calls this flexibility, which provides some important guidance to answer the research questions on the one hand and allows the researcher to follow up some additional, interesting directions during the interview, the "semi" part of semi-structured interviews, on the other.

> "The grounded theory interview is dependent upon the ability of the researcher to travel a path through the interview with the participant. The greater the level of structure imposed, the less able the interviewer will be to take the optimal route." (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 75)

During the research process, after analysing the first data sets, some questions and directions that turned out to be important were added and allowed the interview guide to evolve (see Appendix A) while other questions became more and more saturated (Birks & Mills, 2011). For example, after the analysis of the first interviews it became clear that emoticons are generally accepted within organisational posts, but that their usage is seen differently and more sceptically. This matter was therefore addressed within the next interviews to find out what makes emoticons appropriate, useful and finally well accepted in an organisational post.

Finally and in addition to all the topics and questions that have been asked during the interview, each interviewee was invited "to raise any points that have not been asked so far" (Oates, 2006, p. 193) at the end of the interview – to make as sure as possible that nothing was left out that could have been interesting for both the interviewee and the study.

Before entering the field, both the process of interviewing and the interview guide were tested in preparation for the main interview process (Bailey, 2007; Mayer, 2008). Pilot interviews with some willing friends and respondents similar to the ones that were chosen to be interviewed in the first round of the main study were undertaken in line with advice given by Richards (2009).

3.3.2.4. Theoretical Sampling and Selection of Participants

> "Initial sampling in grounded theory gets you started; theoretical sampling guides where you go" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 197)

After preparation for the interviews (see sections 3.3.2.2 and 3.3.2.3), the concept of initial sampling was chosen to get started and to get into the field. Instead of identifying a complete, detailed sample of people to investigate in the whole, completely pre-scheduled research process (Oates, 2006), the researcher started to look for some very first, relevant people who might have something to say about the area of research, meaning people who might have had some experience in communicating in SNS environments and interpreting organisational messages via Facebook.

The first three participants were selected according to two criteria. Firstly, because this study is interested in the interpretation of messages within Facebook's SNS, they should have been active social media users and a member of Facebook. Secondly, they should have been connected to at least one organisational, corporate profile, for example been a Facebook fan[3] of an organisation's official Facebook fanpage. The last decision was not only made due to the fact that the study focuses on public relations but also to ensure that the first interviewees had some degree of experience with PR communication practices in social media environments, ensuring that there was already something for them to talk about. All of the first three interviewees were from the circle of acquaintances of the researcher and his Facebook friends. In most of the cases Facebook was used to contact them, send a PDF version of the research information sheet (see Appendix B) and finally to schedule the interviews. At the end of each interview, snowballing – a concept in which respondents were

3 Facebook uses the term "**fan**" to deferentiate fans from personal friends within the social network: While two individuals with private profiles on the SNS can become "friends" on Facebook, individuals and organisations can not. Instead, a private user can like the organisation's Facebook fanpage - and become a Facebook fan of this organisation.

asked to name participants that are similar to them and could be helpful for further interviews (Dörnyei, 2007) – helped to find more potential interviewees (Mikos & Wegener, 2005).

After these first, initial interviews, the process switched from initial sampling to **theoretical sampling** – and with this to a version of sampling that is typical for data collection in a research process under the approach of grounded theory. While the requirements for the selection of the first interviewees were driven by the idea of just getting started with plausible and willing candidates, theoretical sampling was driven by what the data was 'telling' and 'pointing towards' next. Thus, it was important to start transcribing and coding the first chunks of data right after the first interview to select the next possible interviewee, analyse the resulting interview and go on and on with this developmental procedure. While it was not known where this process would take the researcher or when the rotation of data generation, analysis, generation and analysis would be complete at the beginning of the study, the researcher followed the path of the emerging theory. According to Urquhart (2013) and as discussed in section 3.3.1.2., this process is seen as a typical, important and very powerful idea of GTM.

> "Theoretical sampling is deciding on analytical grounds where to sample from next. In this way, the theory can be quickly developed based on emerging concepts. One common way to increase the scope of theory is to sample unlike groups, while, to increase the explanatory power of the theory, researchers sample diverse and less saturated concepts." (Urquhart, 2013, p. 194)

Apart from the first three people who were involved in the initial sampling procedure discussed above, theoretical sampling was used to enrich the first, theoretically raw findings in additional interviews by sampling interviewees who appeared to promise the most relevant information (Willig, 2001). While a full, demographic list of interviewees is shown in Appendix D, interviewees were chosen "in order to test and refine new theories, ideas or categories as they emerge from the data collected and analysed so far" (Oates, 2006, p. 274).

As one example, both Emma and Finja (who were interviewed at the beginning of the process) were talking about the usage of emoticons between different age groups, stating that it feels like their parents are using them totally differently than they do. It was especially Emma's responses which led the researcher to the decision to try to interview someone in the age group of her parents (unfortunately her parents were too far away to be interviewed themselves), to establish if they would say that they would not use emoticons the way she or her personal friends are using them:

> "It's quite funny: when my mom writes me via WhatsApp, she's also sending some funny, little pictures [she means emoticons] which have absolutely no connection but she's probably sending them just because she finds them beautiful at the moment and thought 'Oh well, I'm sending these to her'. But I would say within my friends, it has a conscious, yeah, background." (Emma)

Following this statement from Emma, I contacted 64-year-old Friederike, to whom I was referred by another interviewee.

3.3.2.5. Theoretical Saturation

At a certain point the interviewees' feedback started to repeat itself – while the findings and their categorisation led to refinement after refinement and finally to theoretical saturation, a point which made clear that additional data would not lead to an additional modification of the categories built to that point (Oates, 2006). Theoretical saturation – in this case – means that "gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 213), that more interviews were not seen as promising any new kind of information important for the study and that all categories created to that point are simply rich enough, saturated for the current study.

First evidence for this saturation occurred between interview number 8 and 9 while it became more intense and significant after the 12th interview. From this point on the additional interviewees started to mention and repeat things that were told and thematised in at least some former interviews. As a result, the categories became more and more saturated while the theory began to emerge. However, to make sure that nothing new and important was left and that the emerging theory was really saturated, three additional interviews were undertaken. Thus, theoretical saturation was reached after 15 interviews and led to a point that in grounded theory is seen as the end of data collection for the present project. (Bowen, 2008; Flick, 2005; Birks & Mills, 2011) Nevertheless, Willig (2001) points out that this point of stopping data collection functions as a goal in one study but might not provide the final answer to a research question. The founders of grounded theory themselves are clear that theory is always provisional:

> "When generation of theory is the aim, however, one is constantly alert to emergent perspectives, what will change and help develop his theory. These perspectives can easily occur on the final day of study or when the manuscript is reviewed in page proof: so the published word is not the final one, but only a pause in the never-ending process of generating theory." (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 40)

3.3.3. Data Analysis

According to Croker (2009) qualitative research requires the researcher to be intuitive, to see links and patterns in the data, and to build these into themes that simultaneously fulfil the purpose of the research. Mayer (2008) argues that the analysis of qualitative research is not only about the understanding of plain words; it is about the interpretation of what is said during the interviews.

In order to make the process of data collection and analysis easier, several technical and computer-based tools were used. Firstly – and as mentioned earlier – all interviews were recorded (Birks & Mills, 2011) using a separate, password-secured university account on the researcher's MacBook. Secondly, transcription software called f5 (which is the Mac OS X version of its MS Windows equivalent f4) helped the researcher to transcribe the recorded interviews. Thirdly, MAXQDA 11 for Mac was chosen to help the researcher during the analysis of the transcribed interviews – which was especially helpful while sorting and analysing codes and categories, because of the ability to visualise different codes and quotes and memos that belong to one category.

Typical for grounded theory, the researcher started to transcribe and analyse each of the collected interviews directly after its collection, which merged the normally separated phases of data collection and data analysis (Willig, 2001). Since the interviews were done with German interviewees in the German language, all interviews were transcribed and coded in German following Urquhart's (2013) advice that it is "better to code in the language of the text, then translate the codes from the original language to English for the purposes of writing up" (Ibid, p. 105). For the purpose of writing up this dissertation the final codes, categories and selected quotes were translated into English.

3.3.3.1. Coding in GTM

Immediately after the first two interviews were transcribed, the researcher started to analyse them using codes to define and sort what his interviewees were talking about. Charmaz (2014) describes this process as follows:

> "Coding means categorizing segments of data with short names that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data. Your codes show how you select, separate, and sort data and begin an analytic accounting of them. [...] Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means." (Ibid, p. 111ff)

Willig (2001) points out that these codes and categories help not only to make visible what the interviewees were talking about during the interviews, but are also a highly analytical tool to interpret the data while starting to develop theory. Charmaz (2014) and Flick (2009) refer to the interpretative nature of this process. As the one who is reading, analysing and – first and foremost – actively naming what has been said during the interview, using codes and categories, the researcher is the one who is defining what is important in the data and the one who is naming this important chunk of data using a code or category that empirically makes sense for him. On the other hand, Willig (2001) adds that these codes and, "categories in Grounded Theory emerge *from* the data, they are not mutually exclusive and they evolve throughout the research process" (Ibid, p. 34).

Three types of codes were employed, (1) in vivo codes which borrowed terms the interviewees themselves used to describe a phenomenon, (2) some (and very limited) constructed codes borrowed from basic previous knowledge and (3) summarising codes and categories which describe the process of what is happening in the researcher's own words (Flick, 2009). In the latter category, the code *friendly participation* was generated to describe a certain language and phraseology encountered in the interviews, as will be discussed in section 3.2.1. Categories, on the other hand, were used to assemble similar and/or related codes into a group.

During the whole process of coding, but mostly during the second and third phase of coding and analysing, memos – which are a fundamental part of all grounded theory research – were used to record (raw) thoughts, feelings and ideas about the research process, to note some upcoming questions about the coded material or to help remember where to sample next and in which directions the research could lead next (Birks & Mills, 2011). These consistently written memos helped not only to log how interpretation and decisions about coding and further sampling were made during the research process – because they saved a raw thought that later turned out to be important – but also because they helped in building the later theory.

3.3.3.2. Open Coding

Typical of all kinds of grounded theory study, the process of interpretation begins with the step of open coding (Flick, 2009; Strübing, 2014). Following this, the analysis of each of the transcribed interviews began in a very detailed, intensive and open way. During this stage, every line was read carefully while seen as possibly relevant. Charmaz (2014) describes this step of line-by-line coding – which she calls "the initial grounded theory coding as gerunds" (Ibid, p. 121) – as

> "a heuristic device to bring the researcher into the data, interact with them, and study each fragment of them. This type of coding helps to define implicit meanings and actions, gives researchers directions to explore, spurs making comparisons between data, and suggests emergent links between processes in the data to pursue and check." (Ibid)

Charmaz (2014) established the border between coding for topics – which is a more general type of coding used in many other qualitative studies to identify topics that the researcher will sort and talk about later – and line-by-line grounded theory coding – which "goes deeper into the studied phenomenon" (Ibid, p. 121), trying to understand what is happening there. It is the main goal of open coding to break down what has been said during the interview, to create some first categories and to produce a deeper understanding (Flick, 2009) of the phenomenon being investigated. Strauss and Corbin (1990) summarise open coding as

> “the analytic process by which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. The basic analytic procedures by which this is accomplished are: the asking of questions about the data; and the making of comparisons for similarities and differences between each incident, event and other instances of phenomena. Similar events and incidents are labelled and grouped to form categories.” (Ibid, p. 74)

Strübing (2014) and Breuer (2010) call this process of open coding the ‘fracturing’ of the data and refer to the ability of the researcher to get a feeling about what is happening within the data. While sitting with the data and going through the transcribed interviews, the researcher should ask basic questions such as: Who? When? Where? What? How? How much? Why? (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). This is exactly what was done during the open coding stage of this study. Thereafter, the researcher tried to be as open, thoughtful and detailed as possible throughout the whole process of reading and analysing the interview data. While creating the codes using the three types of codes mentioned above (see section 3.3.3.1.), there was also awareness of possible categories that might make sense to summarise or to cluster individual codes into a thematic group. An example is shown in the table 3.3.

3.3. An Example of Coding in Grounded Theory

Example Section	Open Code	Category	Main Category
"I don't have the time to sit down and read all of it piece by piece."	Lack of time	Casual Interpretation	Communication within Facebook
"It's simply too personal again. (...) They really need to stay objective."	Some Last Distance	Distanced Closeness	User-Oriented Appropriateness

3.3.3.3. Axial Coding

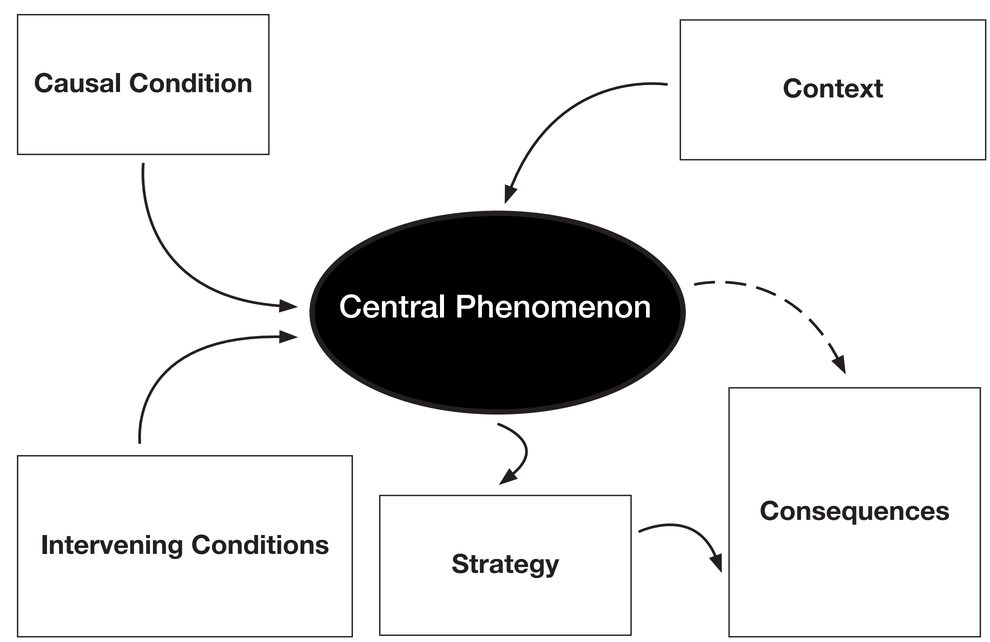
While open coding can be seen as the very first step of trying to identify and understand what the interviewees are saying and what is happening in the data, axial coding is the first step of creating a meaning of these first, open codes.

During this phase – which is the second out of three steps during grounded theory analysis – the researcher was looking at the codes and categories created at the stage of open coding with what Oates (2006, p. 274) describes as “a more abstract level of analysis”. This sought relationships between different codes and categories by comparing these codes and categories; asking the question how they might relate to each other (Flick, 2009). While constant comparison is a continuous and important process during every step of a grounded theory study and not exclusively used during the step of axial coding, it is the first time that this comparison helps to build a bridge between categories and emerging sub-categories in order to start building some kind of a theory. Thus, axial coding is all about relating categories in a way that promises to make sense and helps to generate a theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define this step as follows:

> “Axial coding is the process of relating subcategories to a category. It is a complex process of inductive and deductive thinking involving several steps. These are accomplished, as with open coding, by making comparisons and asking questions. However, in axial coding the use of these procedures is more focused, and geared toward discovering and relating categories in terms of the paradigm model.” (Ibid, p. 114)

This paradigm model – introduced by Strauss and Corbin while later criticised by Glaser (Charmaz, 2014) – can be seen as a general sorting manual (Flick, 2009). As illustrated in figure 3.1, the model helps to illuminate a certain phenomenon by coding around its axis, thus illuminating the connections between a phenomenon and its causal conditions, strategies which help to deal with a phenomenon, intervening

3.4. The Paradigm Model



(based on: Strübing, 2014, p. 25)

conditions that inform about the given preconditions and the context that will lead to the consequences of this process (Strübing, 2014).

In the context of this study, the paradigm model has not only been used within the stage of axial coding, but also to illuminate the connections between the central phenomenon and its main categories that emerged within the grounded theory research process, which is shown in figure 4.1. on page 102.

3.3.3.4. Selective Coding

After the phase of axial coding, selective coding was used as the final step of analysing the data. While selective coding itself does not differ that much from what has been done during axial coding, it continues on a much higher level (Flick, 2009), which means focusing on the relations between the categories that were seen as the main categories – and as a result finally leading the researcher to a grounded theory. It is the focus of this phase to develop potential core concepts or core variables and select what Strauss and Corbin (1990) call a core category. A category relates systematically to all the other categories and sub-categories developed before and can be seen as the central phenomenon of what has been studied. Oates (2012) summarises selective coding as the process where

> "the researcher focuses attention on just the core codes – those that have emerged as being vital for any explanation (theory) of the complex phenomenon being investigated. These will be combined into a theory that explains the phenomenon under investigation." (Ibid, p. 275)

The core code or core category and its connection to the other categories is what gives the emerged theory its story line, the ability to group the data in a sensible way and explain why something is happening under these conditions, whereas different conditions would lead to something else (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Breuer (2010) calls this step of the analysis the one that reaps the fruits of coding done before.

3.3.4. Ethical Considerations and Data Protection

Before each interview, the exact purpose of the research project was explained to the interviewee. The researcher let them know why he is interested in this area of research, what kind of questions could have been asked and for what and how he was using the information they were giving. Both a written information and consent form (see Appendix C) guided the researcher and the possible interviewees through this pre-conversation. After this conversation, the participants had the chance to ask any questions they had about the upcoming interview process or about the research interest. Before finally asking for their consent for being an interviewee and to sign the corresponding form, it was clarified that there was the option to withdraw from the study at any given time before the submission of this thesis.

During the whole research project, the researcher was diligently aware of all ethical questions of qualitative research in a real-world setting. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), there are four ethical issues: reducing the risk of unanticipated harm, protecting the interviewee's information, effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study, and reducing the risk of exploitation.

During every step of data collection and the whole project the researcher had in mind that the interviews took place in the physical world with real people who are not anonymous. As a consequence it was important to think about how to protect the identities of participants. In addition, research that focuses on and happens within the Internet and SNS raises some additional ethical questions because there is no clear border between what is public and private, especially within SNS like Facebook (McKee & Porter, 2009). Thus, the researcher might have seen a lot of private, personal information while using Facebook and the Internet during the interviews. To protect the interviewees, digital data that was not needed for this study was immediately deleted after transcribing the interviews. In addition, the researcher has not asked for personal data not needed for this study, like the exact date of birth or hometown.

To protect the interviewee's identity as much as possible, their real names were replaced by new ones, which were used within this dissertation. While most of these names were picked randomly, some interviewees explicitly asked for a special name that should be used within the dissertation: "Oh, if you have to use a different name, would it be possible to use 'Gandalf' for me?" (Gandalf)

Also, every kind of personal information that was part of the data needed for this thesis (e.g. the little Facebook profile picture or the interviewees' Facebook user name besides a screenshot of a Facebook post) was made invisible and anonymous. All data, the original audio/video files of the interviews and the manuscripts, were saved on highly secured, password-protected flash drives.

3.4. Summary and Conclusion

It is of significant importance for each research project to choose a research methodology that promises to answer the research questions well. Therefore, it was the purpose of this chapter to argue for both the decision of using an interpretative grounded theory approach and the usage of qualitative, semi-structured interviews. As this dissertation is combining two research areas that have not been combined in this way before, focusing on the question of how Facebook users want to be addressed by public relations communication within the social network, grounded theory is seen as an appropriate methodology because of its ability to generate a grounded, theoretical understanding about an area that has not been well illuminated before (Goulding, 1998).

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were argued to be the most promising method for data collection because they allow the interview to be broadly outlined in advance, but give the interview process enough flexibility to ensure that the researcher could follow additional, interesting directions during the interview itself (Bailey, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007).

Having argued for and explained the usage of the Straussian version of grounded theory, with open coding as the start of the analysis, followed by axial coding and selective coding, the next chapter will elaborate this GTM analysis by presenting and discussing the results of the research process.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1. Introduction

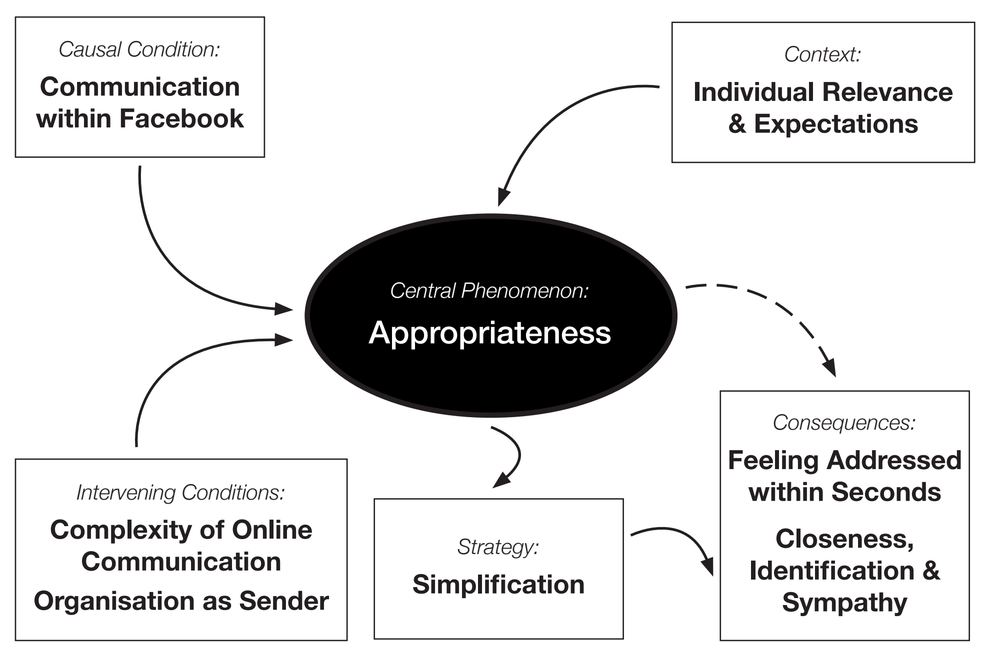
This chapter presents and discusses the results of the research project. It was the purpose of this study to explore how Facebook users want to be addressed by public relations communication within the social network and to develop a theoretical understanding that explains what characteristics affect the user's interpretation and his or her judgement of whether a PR professional has used the right language and phraseology on Facebook.

Following the methodology outlined in the previous chapter, open coding was used to start the analysis of the 15 interviews that were undertaken in this study. Accordingly, the first interviews were analysed before the last ones were even scheduled. Throughout the process of analysis these first open codes were followed by additional ones, clustered into groups of categories or even developing into a core category. After that, axial coding was used to compare and relate the most important categories and subcategories before selective coding was used to develop a core concept and generate the final theory in choosing the core category that relates and connects to the other categories that were seen as main categories. These main categories, the core elements of the grounded theory model (central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, intervening conditions, context and consequences) are presented as the headlines of the particular sections, whilst the sub-categories are outlined in separate sub-sections. Open codes are printed bold within the text.

After each in-depth presentation of the six aforementioned core elements of the theoretical model, the results and its meaning will be discussed in regard to the research questions that were guiding this dissertation. Whenever possible, the components of the theoretical model the findings will be compared to findings of previous studies and to previous knowledge presented within the literature review.

At the end of this chapter, the emergent theory of user-oriented appropriateness, which is visualised in figure 4.1., will be summarized and explained in its entirety to present a grounded and theoretical understanding of what affects users' interpretations of PR posts within Facebook and of what makes this organisational communication appropriate in the eyes of the users.

4.1. The Model of the "Theory of User-Oriented Appropriateness"



4.2. Core Elements of the Emergent Theory

Throughout the process of coding and building categories using open, axial and selective coding, the participants' wish of a form of communication that fits into their personal Facebook world became apparent consistently. Codes like "short and simple", "direct language", "lack of time", "not too corporate", "unnecessary formality", "netspeak" or "difference between friends and organisations", for example, were all created from the first interview data. During the process of analysing and redefining codes, and grouping them into main and subcategories, *user-oriented appropriateness* emerged as the central phenomenon that connects all the other main categories. The other main categories are ***communication within Facebook*** (causal condition), *simplification* (strategy), *complexity of online communication* and *organisation as sender* (both intervening conditions), *individual relevance* and *expectations* (context) and finally feeling *addressed within seconds* and *closeness, identification and sympathy* (consequences). While all these categories will be presented and discussed in the following sections, the emergent model of the theory of user-oriented appropriateness is shown in figure 4.1. on page 102.

4.2.1. Central Phenomenon: User-Oriented Appropriateness

As online communication can generally be seen as a particular form of communication (see sections 3.3. and 3.4.), organisational PR communication within the social network Facebook also has its individual character. All of the interviewees who took part in this study made clear that the right balance or appropriateness of the post structure is seen as a central and important aspect in the process of feeling addressed. Repeatedly, they used words like "fit", "balanced", "coherent", "proper" and "appropriate" to describe the form of communication they expect within the social network, especially if used by organisations. Besides the fact that several aspects influence this expected appropriateness – which all will be presented later in this chapter – the central phenomenon of this study refers to four subcategories that emerged during the process of coding and analysing. First, there is appropriateness as an acceptable balance of closeness and distance used to 'speak' to the users; secondly, it is the appropriateness of choosing the right words to 'say' something within the channel of Facebook; thirdly, users talked about the appropriateness of using the right number of emoticons to make it easier to interpret the post and fourth, there is appropriateness as friendly participation that produces a feeling of sharing a piece of information between friends.

'Distanced Closeness'

One of the first aspects that led to the higher-level phenomenon of appropriateness is the right balance between distance and closeness. As Facebook is a social platform on which many private posts between friends occur, nearly all of the interviewees wanted organisations to adopt the private articulation their friends are using, which is a language that is more personal than impersonal.

Peter, a 31-year-old "heavy user" of Facebook, justified his wish of a more **personal, private phraseology** primarily with the fact that organisations are communicating within his private space.

> "It's my Facebook, so if I follow a fanpage, then it's something where I can identify myself with or what I use in my life. So they can speak to me directly. Because it's more personal for me."

Several participants observed the way organisations were speaking to them unconsciously at first sight. Approached on the different phraseology, nearly all (13 out of 15) participants preferred the more direct, personal form of communication.

> "For me this personal kind of language is more appealing, because it's nicer to me." (Steffi)

Interestingly, even the 64-year-old Friederike noted that she prefers a personal language within Facebook, although she is generally "not the type of woman" who always prefers a direct, personal language from people she does not know.

> "But in this case, honestly, it wouldn't even [thinks] no, it wouldn't bother me at all. It isn't as anonymous anymore then, right?"

Herbert – who is her age, too – added that this kind of personal, direct communication is making the text less monotonous, making it more fun to read the posts.

Often, interviewees were using the terms "personal" and "direct" interchangeably: two thirds (10 out of 15) of them used "personal language" to phrase something similar they were describing with the words "**direct language**". However, participants made clear that they prefer a direct form of communication within Facebook – which particularly became apparent in each of the interviews while the interviewees were reading and scrolling through posts that were not written in a direct way. This lack of directness was something one user described as a "passive" form of communication that felt wrong on Facebook because companies should show some personal interest in their customers.

> Gandalf: (scrolling) "So they talk to no one directly, which I think is shit."
>
> Interviewer: "What do you mean with 'no one directly'?"
>
> Gandalf: "Yeah, 'From now on we start a new…' they don't speak to the customer, so here they don't address the customer directly."
>
> Interviewer: "They write 'We introduce you…'"
>
> Gandalf: "Yeah, fine. But in this case this 'you' isn't directly addressed to the customer but, well, it's always just like 'Here is a bunch of customers and we somehow wanna communicate with them'."

Iris was as critical as Gandalf about the fact that a company was choosing words that made her feel like the company is not speaking directly and personally to her as a single customer but to all of the customers in one group (which she called "sneering" because the group of Facebook users is simply too big to feel personally spoken to). Over half (54%) of the participants found this version of group communication appropriate on Facebook if the company is still using a phraseology that is not too formal. Alex, Finja and Verena, for example, were all saying that speaking to a whole group is a "smart" (Alex), "polite" (Finja) and "charming" (Verena) way for organisations to be close on the one hand but still distanced on the other. And – as Steffi said – it is probably the version that initially scares the fewest people possible.

> "It's totally okay for me. I mean, I can live with that, that they, yes, generalise it, not talk to me personally and do it on a general level, like 'You, my friends' like that? (Laughing) Well, it's a little lordly but I still think it's okay. I can work with that. It's something in between where I think 'Well, that fits somehow along with it'." (Steffi)

In fact, all participants agreed that one of the most important things is what Peter called **familiarity**: "They don't address one directly but they still write it like as if, as if it's familiar. Right?" Organisations should simply choose a phraseology that fits into Facebook's world of social, often private conversations, which will be discussed in a more detailed way in section 4.2.2.

Yet, for Emma language and words that are not like private conversations and too formal create some degree of **unnecessary distance** she does not need on Facebook. Asked why she prefers a closer, more personal language on Facebook she said:

> "Because the distance is probably already there? So, well, I mean..., so the person who is posting that, I don't know that person. That's someone who just writes the IKEA posts. If I see someone face-to-face, it is possible to create distance by talking formally. And I need that in that case – but I don't need it here within Facebook. Here I already have some distance because I don't know the person."

While all of the participants were open for some level of close, personal language in corporate posts, most of them (87%) noted an invisible border that organisations should not cross; keeping at least **some distance**. For most of them this border had to do with the phraseology used within the post, with the usage of words and language to say something. Comments like “not too sloppy” (Verena), “not a language that’s too relaxed” (Friederike), “not this overdone kind of language” (Malte) or “don’t want to be packed into a certain corner by the language” (Manuela) made clear that they want organisations to choose words and the phraseology very carefully. Users are aware that there is a company speaking and not their best friends (see section 4.2.4.1) – and they want organisations to be empathic about this phenomenon.

> “I really don’t like it if it’s too flat or too demanding or too obviously what they want. Not too straightforward, but too … well, like ‘Hey ladies, come here and drink a glass of champagne!’ I mean, that’s something where I think ‘Nope, I’m out, I don’t want it’. So that’s, again, something that wouldn’t speak to me at all. It’s annoying and doesn’t appeal to me.” (Steffi)

Felix and Gandalf both referred to the need for some degree of **objectivity** in organisational posts compared to the ones their friends are posting on Facebook.

> “So the company is always somehow objective. That’s ... My friends always, at least I think, do it on a more emotional level if they post something – even if it’s just about the schnitzel from the evening or that they go to the gym, or whatever. But companies should always have some form of objectivity in it.” (Gandalf)

> “It’s simply too personal again. (...) They really need to stay objective.” (Felix)

Finja compared the organisational posts to the ones of her friends, too, saying that she would find it weird “if companies go more with the personal track and use a lot of smileys.” For her and, in total, 11 participants of this study, organisational posts should be written in a direct, personal way, “but not too personal, so always keeping some last distance.”

(Appropriate) Wording

As too much distance is not what participants wanted in organisational Facebook posts, 100% of them saw unnecessary formality associated with this problem, affecting the acceptance of corporate posts in a negative way and thereby creating the opposite of what PR is looking for: distance instead of closeness.

Herbert and Gandalf find formal speech “absolutely impersonal”. For the latter, formal phraseology should not be used on a channel like Facebook, where he is communicating and chatting with friends, too. Therefore, organisations that are using words that are too formal and impersonal create distance instead of closeness to the user.

> “It’s too far away, right? For me this formal kind of language is always, yeah, it’s a form of distance. It’s like how we’ve learned to speak appropriately in school, you know? People that you talk to in a formal way, to those you don’t have close contact.” (Gandalf)

Iris articulated a similar view, adding that this formality of speech is making the post “stiff”, making it harder for her to get involved and stay open to the communicating company: “I think I would – hmm, if it would have been written in a formal form – I think I would feel a little bit more distance.”

Finja felt like formality on Facebook is in general “like out of space”. Although they did not exactly use Finja’s words, nearly all participants were saying something similar: Malte said that Facebook “simply isn’t formal”, Verena mentioned that formality would “feel wrong” within Facebook and Peter argued that formality on Facebook shouldn’t be used because he has to be formal all day at work and doesn’t want this formality after work while he is online using his social network.

Yet, Iris and Herbert both go one step further. They said that a formal phraseology would feel like organisations talk down to them.

> "I think nothing of this formal language around here. When I'm in a big bulk of people I wanna talk to that big bulk. When they start using this gobbledygook, this formal language, you know? Then I'll say 'Oh gosh, oh gosh, oh gosh, you, who are those people?' They're almost riding the high horse because it's so high up." (Herbert)

Most stridently of all respondents, Gandalf simply said that he ignores organisations which are using some kind of formality on Facebook. While scrolling through a post of an organisation that he knew was using that kind of disliked formality, he stated "They always write that formally, I don't read it" and scrolled through in the presence of the researcher.

Another way in which participants discussed the need of an appropriate wording on Facebook is through their non-acceptance of **corporate wording** and marketing wording. Seven out of 15 interviewees (47%) directly criticised the phenomenon of organisations that try to use words and phrases on Facebook that sound like the ones normally used in glossy marketing prospectuses and catalogues. Within Facebook, they do not want a language that is "bloated" (Steffi), or one that "beats around the bush" (Alex) and feels like "banter" (Herbert) or "marketing gibberish" (Gandalf, Verena).

> "I'd appreciate it if the companies here start less 'talking around' and just being honest. I mean, get to the point, this talking around is annoying me. They should be reachable, close and not always that fluffed up." (Verena)

Instead, for all the interviewees participating in this study, appropriateness means a wording that cares about the users. This means one that is **user-oriented** and **easy to understand** using a language their participants themselves would use. Leon, for example, mentioned several times that he enjoys companies which communicate "focused on [him] as the customer", using a phraseology close to his own because "that's how they reach me". Romy, Verena and Steffi call this phraseology one that is "on the same wavelength" while Emma and several others used terms like "fresh", "young", "easy" and "colloquialism" to describe the language they expect organisations to use within Facebook (terms that will be discussed in other parts of the emerging theory of this study).

What was generally interesting within the interviews is that all interviewees found some words or phrases they just did not like. Felix, for example, was struggling with a "really?" before one post, while Manuela had some very similar problems:

> Manuela: "What irritates me here is 'your kids'."
>
> Interviewer: "Could you try to explain why?"
>
> Manuela: "Well, the language is just bothering me. This 'kids', don't know."
>
> Interviewer: "Okay. So it's just the word they used instead of children?"
>
> Manuela: "The kids, yeah."
>
> Interviewer: "Because it's a word you wouldn't use yourself?"
>
> Manuela: "Yes, exactly. I think that's it."

Although the word kids is less formal than children, it felt wrong for Manuela because it is not part of her own everyday speech.

In situations like this, all interviewees mentioned that they normally would not read the whole post or spend the time of thinking about it. As Felix said, they would simply "not feel addressed and go on scrolling". In this connection, 54% (8/15) of the participants were referring to the "significant" (Gandalf) role of choosing the right words to say something within Facebook. Steffi, for example, said the chosen words could lead one in the right or the wrong direction of interpretation while Leon just said: “If the text is totally inappropriate, the whole post is inappropriate for me.” But if the organisation “tries to understand what kind of language I’m looking for” (Leon) and is using a simple, user-oriented language that is easy to understand, “then I can quickly read, think ‘all right’ and move on” (Emma).

Selected Usage of Emoticons

Another way in which participants of this study demonstrated the need of appropriateness in corporate posts is through the right usage of emoticons within a Facebook post. Generally speaking, all of the interviewees were used to emoticons as a way of helping the person on the other side of the screen to interpret the message the right way, to express feelings and create a friendly atmosphere in both their own messages and the ones their friends are posting. And they all agreed on finding these emoticons very helpful to make the tricky messages easier to understand (which will be discussed in more detail within section 4.2.3.).

However, during the first interviews it became clear that all interviewees were accepting emoticons in corporate posts too, but that they expect organisations to use these “expressions of emotions” thoughtfully. For Finja, who was interviewee number three of this study, and 11 of the other participants (80%) there were “**just a few standard smileys**” that organisations should use within their posts on first sight – like the winking smiley ;-), the happy one :-) or even sometimes the sad one :-(. Only Romy, Gandalf and Peter made clear statements that generally all smileys available could be used in corporate posts, while Steffi, Friederike, Verena, Leon and Iris were somewhere in between these two groups, preferring the ‘normal’ standard emoticons while accepting others if they really fit. Pointing to a post the German retailer of beauty products DOUGLAS made using a heart emoticon <3, Iris for example said: “It's used in combination with a beauty product so in this case it's not bothering me at all.”

This connection between what is said in which context is something that all of the interviewees mentioned somehow as a benchmark for organisations to judge whether or not the usage of an emoticon is appropriate in a situation or not.

> “They have to make sense and shouldn't just be used because it's pretty to put some little pictures in. It has to fit situatively in the post and also stand in the direct context what they actually want to write about, otherwise it doesn't make sense to me.” (Malte)

Like Malte, all interviewees used phrases like “proper”, “has to fit”, “makes sense” or even “appropriate” to explain a situation in which emoticons make sense for them in corporate posts. Examples that were seen as “appropriate” and “useful” by all of them were posts in which the organisations wanted to be funny by saying something in an ironic way. In these cases, the winking smiley or the one with the stretched out tongue helped to make this intended irony clear.

One type of post that was repeatedly mentioned by several participants as an example in which emoticons – even the sad one – should not be used is the post of something that follows a charitable purpose.

> “Well in this case emoticons would be placed wrong. There are areas where you require responsibility and integrity, especially when it's about donations or something. In these cases I don't really want smileys. If they donate to Africa, for example, because those people are in bad condition and it just doesn't fit there.” (Leon)

Generally users preferred emoticons in posts and situations that were written in a fresh, entertaining or funny way. Even Manuela, who described herself as someone who normally prefers the “classical kind of writing”, said that emoticons are very welcome if they bring “some pep” or “a certain humour” into a post, but not if they are just used to “play on one's heart strings” or if their usage feels too calculated. In fact, about two thirds of all interviewees mentioned that the usage of an inappropriate smiley could make the interpretation a lot harder while confusing the user.

> "When they report seriously about something and then there's randomly a heart emoticon behind it, then I would think 'Weird, what do you want with a heart? Like, go away!' I mean, I just have to see when the smiley is too much, that I think, yes now you are too friendly, I understand what you want but you don't need a smiley after that. And in general, sharing hearts is also where I think: 'Well, yes, you can do that - but you don't have to'." (Steffi)

In addition to this quote, Gandalf mentioned his rule of "the more formal [the context], the less emoticons" should be used in corporate posts. And as Iris, one of the last interviewees in this study, was summarising herself at the end of the interview, organisations should be "very, very careful" when deciding whether or not to use an emoticon within their post, judging its appropriateness based on both context and helpfulness for the user – and all in all, use smileys and emoticons "very economically".

Friendly Participation

Asked about how participants wanted organisations to talk to them using Facebook for PR purposes, appropriateness was often discussed in terms of a communicative style that sounds – or reads – more like a "**friendly participation**", one that Finja tried to describe in saying "It's like they're just thinking: 'Hey, we'd just love to let you know'." This friendly level of communication is something that became apparent while analysing more and more interviews and re-reading the screenshots of the posts that the interviewees stated as the ones they liked a lot. It was eye-catching that the same, or at least very similar, posts were liked again and again by different participants. As the two examples in figures 4.2. and 4.3. show, all these posts were using a very casual, friendly phraseology that sounded "like one of my friends did this" (Alex). Peter and Herbert, for example, had the feeling that this friendly

Figure 4.2.: A post by DM, saying: "(N) Breakfast is ready! With a guide for those who are a bit dozy in the morning ;)"

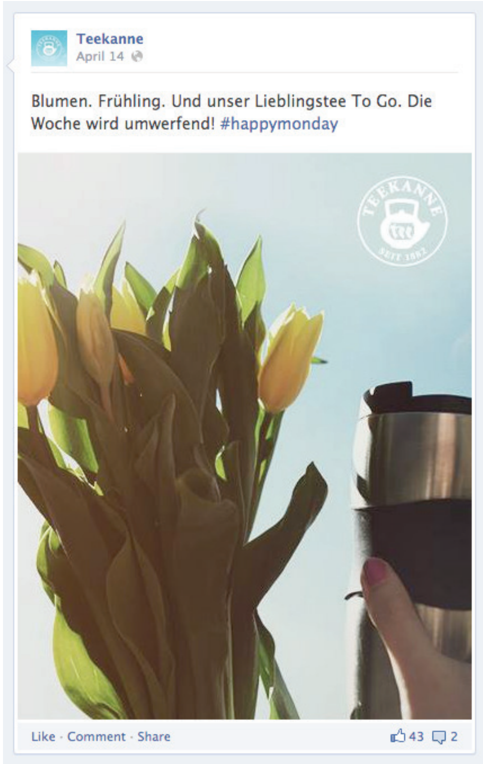


Figure 4.3.: A post by Teekanne, saying: "Flowers. Spring. And our favourite tea to go. It's going to be an awesome week! #happymonday"

communication "seems like they care about me" (Herbert) while Manuela liked the fact that this form of communication sounded not only friendly but "unconstrained". Yet again, Alex referred to a "positive, friendly attitude to life".

Most clear about the fact that a friendly disposition is seen as appropriate was Steffi.

> "I think it has something like 'Aww!', like an understatement, like they are quietly trying, 'Oh hey, let's just be friends' and 'I mean it really nicely' and 'Just look, if you don't it's okay but if you do it's really nice'. Right? Like they are harmlessly trying to bring it to the people. In these cases it has something slightly intimate and well, that something I quite like and that makes it appealing here."

4.2.1.1. Discussion: The Meaning of User-Oriented Appropriateness

As appropriateness is the heart of the theory and has been identified as the central phenomenon that connects all other main categories of the theoretical model of user-oriented appropriateness, much of what has been discussed within the last sections will be influenced by these other main categories and discussed within the following sections in more detail as these other main categories influence whether or not a certain post is judged as appropriate by the user or not. However, what became clear during the analysis is that all interviewees have a certain expectation of what this appropriate communication means if it comes to written PR communication within Facebook. Users want organisation to use a tone that is personal on the one hand but yet not too close on the other. They do not want a language that is too corporate, they do not want unnecessary formality and they do not want unnecessary distance because they are not used to this form of communication within Facebook and within their private, social life. This goes in line with what Evans, Twomey and Talan (2011) found in an earlier study. Organisations have to adopt the private tone and phraseology to be accepted and relevant for their audience within a certain media. Even if organisations are using Facebook to communicate with their audience, for the user Facebook still feels like a personal space where a form of communication that is too professional is not welcome (Heather, 2012). In addition, they do except helpful elements such as smileys and emoticons which were created to enrich online communication (Crystal, 2011; Baym, 2010; Misoch, 2006) – and the participants of this study want organisations to use these smileys and emoticons in a way that enriches the organisational post, too. In most cases three very common smileys – the winking one ;-), the happy one :-) or sometimes the sad one :-(– are enough to help the user understand how something was really meant. However, as the users are still asking for "some last distance" in the language, the usage of smileys and emoticons should always make sense, too, for example to highlight irony. This differentiation makes sense, because no matter how close a user might feel to a brand or an organisation, the user still does not know the person that is posting for this organisation (which will be discussed in more detail in section 4.2.3.), but the user does know his or her personal, private friends. Friends he or she shares memories with, friends he or she feels close to and friends that are not anonymous for this user. The PR officer, on the other hand, is in some way anonymous; he or she is not as close as the private friends are and so they should not speak as privately, personally or emotionally or use as many smileys and emoticons as the friends of the user do within the social network. Thus, PR officers should be “very, very careful” (Iris) in choosing a smiley appropriately, although it helps a lot in the right place.

4.2.2. Causal Condition: Communication within Facebook

The causal conditions that were influencing the participants’ wish for appropriate communication within Facebook all had to do with the fact that this communication is happening within Facebook, a social network where users are accustomed to communicate among friends. Within the interviews, all participants repeatedly contrasted the posts organisations made to the ones their Facebook friends made, using terms and phrases like “close friends”, “like my friends”, “the ones I’m friends with on Facebook”, “my people here”, “my best buddies”, “my sister”, “my family” – or even compared the organisations’ posts to their own posts. In addition, they underlined several times that communication within Facebook is somehow different and that “organisations which move within a social platform” (Finja) should use this platform appropriately.

Channel-Affected Language

All users interviewed for this study are used to communicating among their friends through Facebook. This online **communication among friends** turned out to be one of the core reasons why both the usage of language and the phraseology within Facebook are different compared to other channels PR professionals might use to reach their target group. Ten participants (67%) used the term “**colloquial speech**” to describe the language they and their friends are using within the social network, while Peter and Iris used “**netspeak**” to explain that they generally expect a language that is close to the one they speak in their daily life, except for the fact that it is written down instead of spoken. For Emma and several others, this colloquial speech is first and foremost marked by “**short sentences**” and “**easy words**” because “that’s how people speak”. They do not think too much about how to say something, “they just say it in their normal words” – and these normal words are neither formal nor complicated. “It’s more like the easy language we all speak all day in our everyday life.” (Friederike)

In fact, **simplicity** and the term “**short and simple**” (Emma), which will both be discussed in more detail within section 4.2.3., were repeatedly used by every single interviewee and turned out to be two of the most important characteristics of language used within Facebook. Malte noted that:

> “Facebook is a medium of everyday communication – and that’s what doesn’t need to be more complicated, it’s an easy medium and it should stay easy, I think. And therefore the easier language is helpful.”

Besides this simplicity, most participants used the words “young”, “fresh” or “casual” to describe the colloquial language and phraseology used by them and their friends within Facebook – and the one they see as appropriate language on organisational posts, too. As Gandalf argued, organisations that are using Facebook to reach him as a customer are using a young platform, so they should adopt the **young, fresh language** that is used within this young platform, too. The platform encourages a language that is marked by "liveliness" (Steffi), positive and modern words and the appropriate usage of slang words like "wohoo". Or, in Gandalf's words, that is "everything but dry and boring".

While Iris was justifying all this with the fact that it is how people write within Facebook and within other SNS, Leon simply indicated that he is "expecting this kind of communication within Facebook". Ten participants compared Facebook directly with other, more traditional channels to describe what is different in the forms of communication and language use. Peter, for example, compared a post on Facebook with an article in a local newspaper, saying that the article would be read in a different, more focused and concentrated situation and that there would be more space to give an in-depth summary of what is happening. The Facebook post, on the other hand, has limited space: "For me a few words, or maybe two or three sentences, are the maximum to say something on Facebook" (Peter). Felix and Herbert used a very similar example, too, with the difference that they both compared Facebook with the organisation's website, saying that they would visit the website directly to get in-depth information about a product, for example.

> "A website is just there to inform me. I have to find things fast and to orientate myself." (Felix)

> "The website is where it comes to the crunch." (Herbert)

All three of them, Peter, Felix and Herbert, also mentioned that the language used on Facebook should be "much more fun and entertaining to read" (Peter). While this aspect will be discussed in the following section, Herbert adds that organisations should do this entertainment "on a level that's much more personal than the organisation's website".

Emotional & Entertaining

All participants who took part in this study said that, whether they use one of Facebook's mobile apps or its website, they visit Facebook in their free time as "some kind of leisure activity" (Peter). Thus, all participants mentioned in some way that they are using the SNS to be entertained by their friends (or organisations) and to share their own thoughts, stories and feelings.

This was clear from the first interview undertaken. Emma mentioned several times that she loves "**to be entertained by Facebook**" and that she prefers corporate posts which are "some kind of **funny**" and make her "smile" – a phenomenon which later turned out to be agreed on by all participants of this study. While most of this entertainment is certainly done by the content itself, half of the interviewees mentioned that what they perceived as the right wording could affect the content in both a negative and a positive way. A boring, formal phraseology could make an exciting, funny topic boring while some ironic, funny words could make an every-day topic more interesting and entertaining. As Gandalf stated: "For me Facebook is an entertainment platform and organisations should give their best in really entertaining me." As an example, he mentioned the possibility of using a winking smiley to show self-deprecation. In fact, the right emoticon – e.g. ;-) or :-p – in the right situation was seen as a valuable add-on to bring some liveliness into a sentence by nearly all interviewees.

In addition to the participants' need for entertainment, they also made clear that they care about **emotions** on Facebook, too. What was interesting is that half of the female participants of this study often used words like "cute" and "lovely" to describe their feelings about posts that were using a heart emoticon or one that used a kissing smiley – regardless of the topic concerned. However, even the male participants mentioned the importance of emotional posts. While Gandalf, again, came back to the point that he feels like these emotions are what differentiates Facebook from other channels, like the organisations' websites, Leon said: "The bottom line is that it is an emotional filtration of what to read and what to skip." In this connection smileys were seen as a way to integrate some "harmony" (Felix), add some fun or create a "good mood" (Manuela). Eleven interviewees mentioned that even certain **signal words** could stimulate them in some way.

> "When I read "Hamburg" for example, then I'll stay automatically on that page for a bit. Because I love Hamburg and because I want to know more about what it is, you know, what the post is about." (Emma)

Malte noted that a post with an emotional or funny phraseology would attract his attention much more than the ones without content that stimulate his emotions.

Incidental Communication

How valuable this attention really is within Facebook was evidenced by the fact that both the usage of Facebook as well as the interpretation of posts within Facebook are happening incidentally. Within the interviews, 13 out of 15 (87%) participants made clear that they are using Facebook primarily as a sideline and as some kind of amusement.

> "I'd say I use it while I'm waiting for the bus, for example. Grabbing my phone and scrolling through the posts." (Emma)

> "I mean, if I'm online using Facebook there's probably the phone in my left hand while my child's in my arms." (Verena)

> "For me Facebook is still something that's used as a complementary media while sitting in the train or something." (Malte)

While just two of the older participants (Friederike, 65, and Manuela, 48) were using Facebook in a very focused and singular context, even the 61-year-old Herbert said that he does not use Facebook as primary media. He compared his usage of Facebook to radio, saying that the posts and words on the screen are like the words that are coming out of the radio. They are in the air and on the screen, but he is just listening and reading carefully if something interesting comes up. While being interviewed going through the posts of her Facebook News Feed, Finja mentioned that she had probably never read all the posts that carefully before. As possible reasons for this “superficial reading”, Finja and 10 other participants mentioned two characteristics which are influencing the interpretation of Facebook posts in a negative way and make it harder to read all posts in all detail.

First, all of these 11 participants mentioned a **lack of time**. As discussed earlier in this section, most of the users scrolled through the different posts while doing something else, for example while waiting for the bus. Using phrases like “don’t have the time” (Emma) or “always very busy” (Felix), some interviewees made clear that they are not reading everything carefully.

> “Honestly? I don’t have the time to sit down and read all of it piece by piece. I read things fast, scan them and see if it’s interesting to me, and if the sentence is like the typical long sentences without comma or full stops then I don’t even read it anymore. Because I don’t have the time to spend minutes on a post. It has to be short. The most important bits and then scrolling on and that’s it.” (Verena)

In this regard, Emma spoke about “the fast pace” of today’s life. People like her are always thinking about what to do next while doing something.

> “The shorter and pithier it is what they write, the faster I can build my own picture of what they are saying. That’s the fast moving nature. I mean, let’s say I’m waiting for the bus, for example, with the phone in my hand: when I’m scrolling through the post and there is just one short sentence, then I can read it, understand it and go on.” (Emma)

In addition to that, several participants referred to what Peter called “information overload”, meaning the fact that “there’s simply too much to read, I mean, I couldn’t read everything that's there in all detail." This **stimulus satiation** can be seen as the second influencing condition that leads to the phenomenon of superficial reading. While Emma, here again, is arguing that the mass of posts are simply too much to read while people are online after a long day at work, Malte argues that the abundance of posts is overloading his timeline. Besides all this, and the fact that the number of posts within the News Feed itself is seen as an overload, Romy, Leon, Steffi, Gandalf, Herbert and Verena associated this form of stimulus satiation with the problem of posts that are too long and detailed:

> "I wouldn't feel like reading that, because it's just way too much text. I would just look at the picture for a moment but not read it, because it's simply too much to read for me." (Romy)

> "In most cases it's scaring me when there is a lot of text. And then 'continue reading', I don't even want to. Or, well, if you click on it and you're thinking 'Nah, that's way too much, I didn't wanna read that much'. I think that's too exaggerated for Facebook." (Steffi)

> "I wouldn't make a big deal out of it. No one is going to read incredibly long things here around." (Herbert)

To deal with this combination of information overload and lack of time, all users interviewed for this dissertation mentioned the strategy of **scanning** and the aforementioned **selected reading** while scrolling through the different posts. Instead of reading everything in detail, they are keeping an eye out for the words, posts and topics that might really matter to them. As Malte said, "you are often just skimming and suddenly a specific word or something catches your eye", indicating that this post might be worth reading. Yet, Emma mentioned that she believes she has "something like a built-in filter. While I'm scrolling through my Facebook News Feed, I always know what to read and what to avoid." Whether talking about skimming (Malte), scanning (Finja), diagonal reading (Verena), filtering (Emma) or selected reading (Peter), Peter underlined that all this is happening within seconds and that this procedure is easier to do if there is less to scan. However, he sees this filtering as "more important than ever before. Like saying my brain is reacting and trying to help me focus on what's interesting. Actually, I think it's partially doing this unconsciously, so that I can scroll, filter, get what's happening and go on like this."

What was noticeable in all interviews, too, is that the **first words** of a post play an important role. On the one hand, it was these first words that were scanned and skimmed for something that might be interesting if the post was seen as too long to read in the first place. On the other hand, and much more interestingly for this study, two thirds of the users mentioned that it is the introduction that helps them decide whether or not to go on reading or skip the whole post because it is written in a way they do not like or just not in an interesting way. Finja, Romy, Peter, Malte, Steffi and Herbert all mentioned that they read a maximum of two sentences to make their decision. Romy said "Here I just wouldn't go on reading" after going through the first one and a half sentences of a post that is written in a very formal, traditional way with complicated sentences. Steffi summarised the importance of the first words of a post as follows:

> "It depends on the introduction, let's say on the first two sentences. I'll read them and if they feel interesting to me and are written in a way that's kind of exciting or funny and casual, I go on reading. But if it's just boring and hard to read, why should I go on reading? There are other posts waiting." (Steffi)

4.2.2.1. Discussion: The Meaning of Causal Conditions

As discussed above, it is the user's judgement of whether or not the language and phraseology used in the organisation's post feels appropriate within Facebook. While this appropriateness, the core of the evolving theory of user-oriented appropriateness, is manifold and different factors are affecting the user's feeling of appropriate communication, one key part is the circumstance that this communication between the organisation and the user is happening within Facebook itself – a social network that feels private for the user and in which he or she is used to communicating in a very social, personal and emotional way among friends. Users are sharing parts and stories of their private lifes with their Facebook friends, they are writing about the things they like, what they did the other day and what they are feeling – and they read similar things about and from their friends. As a result, they are socialising their online communication by using Facebook to share personal thoughts, connect with friends and family and transmit messages to other humans in a very social way (Fuchs, 2015; van Dijk, 2013).

This process of social, personal communication among friends is strongly affecting how users want organisations to use language within Facebook because this personal communication between friends has created a certain style and phraseology that users are used to and that they expect within the SNS. This links to the theory of Henning and Huth (1975), who say that different media lead to different expectations on the side of the reader. In the case of Facebook, users expect a language that feels private, direct and personal, one that is driven by simple words, feels very colloquial, is some form of entertainment – and that is easy to understand and interpret because it is close to the one the users use and speak within their daily life. This phraseology, this form of language used for private conversations and private posts within Facebook, feels familiar for the users, and it makes sense that they want organisations to adopt huge parts of this private phraseology and tonation because it has become the norm on Facebook. The social network and their users have started to form their own style of how to use language and of how to communicate within its environment (Crystal, 2011; Baron, 2008). As Peter stated by saying "it's my Facebook", the users are reading the organisations' posts within their very private environment, and within this environment the users are deciding what feels right and what feels wrong.

To underline the significance of the right usage of language and words within Facebook, it is also important to have in mind that the SNS is visited by its users "to be entertained" (Emma). While a huge part of this entertainment is done by the right choice of content, PR officers should also do their best in making the post as emotional, interesting and entertaining as possible in choosing the right words to say something. If appropriate in regards to the content and the reason of the post itself, they could use an emoticon to illustrate some kind of emotionality or write something in a more funny – and entertaining – way.

However, in addition to this private, friendly and emotional phraseology that has become common for the users within Facebook, it is no wonder that the circumstances in which Facebook is used are affecting what feels appropriate and what does not, too. In many situations, Facebook is used as a pastime or as secondary media, for example while waiting for the bus or watching TV. In these situations the users are just looking for something interesting or something entertaining that is easy to read and easy to understand. To find these posts, they are scrolling through their Facebook News Feeds while scanning it for something that could be of interest. The additional problem is that on each user's News Feed a huge number of posts are waiting for their interpretation, which leads to an additional lack of time for the interpretation of each post on the one hand and a stimulus satiation on the other. Both factors are affecting the users interpretation because – as a consequence – the users are now just rushing over all the posts. They are not reading every post bit-by-bit but are looking out for signal words or go through the first words of a post to decide whether or not to go on reading the full post. This whole procedure is happening very fast and, as mentioned earlier, in most of the times done while the users are doing something else or are just in a hurry. All this connects to the problem of CMC that the process of interpretation is often happening quickly (Fischer, 2005) and that little attention is paid by the users (Short et al. 1976).

Following the stimulus satiation and the user's lack of time, the usage of an appropriate, user-oriented language and phraseology that is close to the user's private, casual speech and not too formal or too corporate makes it much easier for the user to interpret the message within seconds because he or she is simply used to this form of communication and does not need to spend an extra amount of time thinking about the exact meaning of the words. Thus, the on-the-side usage of Facebook and the speed of the interpretation require the PR officer to use a very clear, focused, reduced and simple language that can be read and interpreted immediately. All this is directly leading to the strategy of simplification which will be presented and discussed in the following section.

4.2.3. Strategy: Simplification

To meet both the causal conditions of communication within Facebook as well as the central phenomenon of the right amount of appropriateness, simplification has been identified as the most important strategy to meet the participants' expectations of appropriate communication within the social network, and to make the interpretation of corporate posts as easy and fast as possible. To recap, it has been found that users do not want an organisation to use wording that is too corporate, too formal or simply too complicated to understand and interpret within the fast-moving nature of Facebook. What they want is some form of language and text that is "on the same wavelength" (Romy), avoiding everything that could affect the interpretation in a negative way (see section "Avoiding Sources of Interference"on page 130) and really keep it "short and simple" (Emma).

Simple, Everyday Speech

Following the problematic phenomenon of the users' lack of time while online (as discussed in the last section), one point that came up in every interview was the participants' wish for a phraseology that is **simple** and very easy to understand. Statements like "They should make it simple" (Manuela), "I like it that it's written that **easy**" (Felix) or "Oh, sweet, they speak simple" (Emma) all indicate that this simplicity is something that is really important to the users. Peter, for example, defined this simplicity as "short sentences, written in a plain language with words everyone uses". Other interviewees used very similar descriptions. The most important thing for Emma, Steffi, Romy, Verena and Alex was to **avoid multi-clause sentences**, saying things like "Those long nested sentences are the worst, they have to be short sentences which you can understand" (Verena) or "I don't want to think about it for hours" (Steffi). Thus, most of the participants showed a special **antipathy towards complicated, long or loan words**. Malte, again, justified this antipathy due to the length of time it needs to interpret these words and the fact that most other users on Facebook speak in plain language, too. Or as Herbert said it:

> "It should be understandable, right? So that I don't have to use Google or Wikipedia or things like that first to understand what they want to tell me. If I had to use Wikipedia because of all the technical terms or unknown words that I don't understand and wouldn't use by myself, it's a no-go, I would never use those." (Herbert)

Instead of these complicated words and sentences, Herbert and all of the other interviewees want organisations to use a **colloquial speech**, "the easy language we all speak all day in our everyday life" (Finja) discussed earlier in section 4.2.2. For Finja this **everyday speech** is not only easier to understand but closer to the life of the user. Giving organisations the chance to use this everyday speech within Facebook, "feels like they're closer to me, too" (Finja). While Romy concurred with this she also mentioned that she would not take posts seriously that are not using this everyday speech because "it's just wrong on Facebook". As Felix put it, "It's just not authentic here". Malte and Gandalf summarised this in a similar way:

> "All these posts around here should be in a normal everyday language. That would be great." (Malte)

> "They should communicate on the same level, so in the same choice of language, then they're closer to me." (Gandalf)

Keeping It Short

Besides their wish for simple communication, the one term that was used most in all interviews done for this dissertation was the term "short". Repeatedly, participants used words like "**short and simple**" (Peter, Emma, Finja, Alex, Malte, Verena, Brigitte) or "**short and concise**" (Manuela, Herbert, Gandalf, Leon) to describe the perfect length of a post. In addition to these words the participants used to address their wish for briefness, while going through the posts the interviewees liked most it was noticeable that all the posts were written in a very short, simple and concise form, too. To underline how important this brevity is within Facebook, both Herbert and Malte used the old [in German very common] saw "brevity is the soul of wit". One third of all participants mentioned that even a short phrase or one word could be enough if everything is said by this little phrase or the one word. Emma concurred with this by commenting:

> "Well, you can just say things like they are, actually. They don't have to talk around things. The shorter it is, what they write, the best I can make a picture of it." (Emma)

Asked about the **optimal length** of a post, Leon just said: "Generally as short as possible, maybe two or three short sentences." His advice of "two or short three sentences" was something that all the other participants mentioned in some way, too, although Steffi mentioned two or three lines instead of two or three sentences. Peter stated that this short amount of text should be the maximum within Facebook: "If that's not enough space to say what they [the organisations] want to say, they should use a link to direct me to their website or so". As one reason, Alex once again referred to the channel the organisations are using:

> "Here I really just want a short and fast overview. Just a crack into the topic, something that's not just the title but that's probably a little bit more, like something that triggers me and gives me the possibility to understand what it's about, while it's still not too long to read on Facebook. If I want to read a whole text then I'll go to their website or something. But not on Facebook. Here I'm a little scared away by the long text because Facebook is on a different level than a website or a page from the newsletter, for example." (Alex)

Nearly all participants agreed on this point of view, using phrases like "it's way too long" (Emma), "don't like to read it all" (Peter), "shouldn't be too long" (Manuela) or "don't need long, endless texts" (Steffi). Leon, Malte and Alex put this phenomenon down to the previously discussed problem of stimulus satiation, saying "I don't want to be flooded by incredibly long posts" (Leon), "It's too much to experience at first sight" (Alex) or "it's simply too long to read when you're in a hurry" (Malte).

However, some interviewees mentioned that, under certain conditions, for example, an above-average interest in the organisation that is posting the text or the topic discussed in a longer post, a few sentences more might be acceptable on rare occasions (which will be discussed at the end of section 4.2.5.). But as Steffi mentioned in this context, even these posts should be **limited in length**.

> "There I think it's in some cases just a pain in the butt, when somehow, I click on "continue reading", because I feel like the beginning sounds interesting it might be worth to go on reading and then surprisingly there pops up a giant text over the whole page and I think 'Nah, sorry, don't mind but I don't wanna read it anymore.' I mean that's really difficult for me, in most cases." (Steffi)

Verena called all these posts "time-killing". Instead, she wants organisations to focus on what's really important, reducing "all the shitty bushwa around it" and "stay on track". This **focused reduction** on what's really important was something all participants appreciated. As Emma said, "the more terse and focused, the better", while Peter added: "And if I wanna know more about it and need more information, then I click on a link or something that'll give me more. But for the beginning, short is really enough, you know?"

Avoiding Sources of Interference

Along with the decline of posts that are both too long to read "in a hurry" (Malte) and too complicated to interpret within seconds, there were a lot of other things that users did not like in corporate posts because they made these posts harder to interpret. Thus, avoiding these sources of interference makes it a lot easier to interpret these messages – and simplify the communication. One thing that made over half of all interviewees struggle (8 out 15; 54%) were **unknown words** they simply have not heard before. Finja, for example, had a problem with the IKEA post shown in figure 4.4. which was not only too long, but had too many of IKEA's Swedish product names in it:

> "Here I think it's exhausting – whereby it's probably IKEA-style – to read all the names of the products. It's not our language. I mean I get the "Billy" [product name], but a "Klämmig" [product name] or a "Legendarisk" [product name], I would stick on it way too long and I would just fly over and say 'That's not interesting to me, whatever'."

Figure 4.4.: A post by IKEA Germany

Figure 4.5.: A post by Vapiano Germany

In a very similar situation (the post shown in figure 4.5.) Steffi struggled with the word "Vapianisti", a term introduced and used by the German pizza and pasta restaurant Vapiano to name their employees.

> "'… until then the Vapianisti…' Who? What? No! That's just, nah that's, I read it and think 'I don't understand it' and then I would just stop, I wouldn't read any further."

Herbert, who also found a word he did not understand in the first instance, explained the problem with these words: "You read and then suddenly you're jumping around it in your head, asking yourself 'What do they mean with that?' And with a little luck you can somehow understand the context."

However, Herbert, Steffi, Finja and all the other participants who had this experience stated that they wouldn't spend the time thinking about this in their daily Facebook usage.

In addition to the problems that occur while trying to interpret an unknown word, one third of all interviewees were disturbed by the usage of **hashtags** within a post. None of them knew why and how to use these hashtags, and called them "irritating" (Finja), "distracting" (Felix), "disturbing" (Manuela) or "annoying" (Verena). Iris summarised her thoughts about hashtags as follows: "I think they're stupid and annoying. On the one hand in the reading flow and on the other I always ask myself 'What is that?'."

Another source of interference detected by a third of the participants was the **usage of initials**, especially at the beginning of a post. While some organisations, for example, are using a simple "(C)" to give credit to the author of the post, users like Iris ("Why's there a C in parentheses?") and Leon ("For whatever reason this character stands for") did not understand these initials and were impaired in their reading. Verena was very annoyed about them:

> Verena: "What's bothering me is that they always start the posts with a 'C'. I mean there's probably a Cora working or something. Now there's this 'C' in parentheses. Why don't they put the name, the initial at the end of the sentence? You know? I mean, it has to work differently. Or can come to an agreement with each other about who has posted what when. They don't have to put it on the Internet."
>
> Interviewer: "So you simply don't want to see it? "
>
> Verena: "Yeah, right. That's not interesting to me. Indeed, it's bothering me because of the reading flow."

Steffi's reaction was interesting. While she was generally bothered and disturbed by these initials in the first post she saw, she later found a post with a similar usage of these initials that did not bother her at all. Asked why, she surprisingly answered: "You're right. I think it's because I love this company", a phenomenon that will be discussed later in this thesis.

However, all these **disruptions of the reading flow** caused by different sources of interference were something that bothered all interviewees in some way. Whether it was a hashtag, an unknown word, a highlighted area (e.g. a word written in upper case letters), a link that doesn't make sense or simply an enclosed picture that led to some kind of dissonance because the picture's language was different than the one used within the text, they all had the same, negative effect on the interviewees: a lack of interest and a break off from reading.

Assistance in Interpretation

In contrast to the avoidance of sources of interference, all interviewees who were part of this study mentioned some means that really helped them to interpret and understand the written text in a different, easier way.

As will be discussed in section 4.2.4.1. of this chapter in more detail, all interviewees were aware of the fact that text-based online communication in general is more tricky to interpret than richer face-to-face communication, especially if this interpretation happens within the fast-moving environment of Facebook. As a result and to make this interpretation a lot easier, all interviewees were open to the appropriate usage of **emoticons** in corporate posts. While the question of the appropriate usage of emoticons itself has been discussed in section 4.2.1., all participants mentioned and showed several examples of emoticons that were very helpful in interpreting the message correctly. Emma, for example, was scrolling through a post from IKEA that contained a winking emoticon. Asked about the emoticon while she was reading the post and why she started to smile, she said:

> "In this case the smiley shows the irony clearly. I couldn't, I mean, well, that's the way I know, it's a joke. It could also be, if you change the emphasis, for example when you read if differently, … interpret it like blame. 'How could you? How is it possible that you haven't seen that?' So, I would yeah, the smiley is supporting it definitely."

In a very similar case, Peter explained that emoticons are a good and helpful way of emphasising "in which intention something is meant". This is a point of view that all users agreed on, although they partially used other words to describe this phenomenon: “With the winking smiley it’s as plain as day how they meant it” (Leon), “they are expressing the mood” (Herbert) or “it’s a tool to signify an emotion, to put a sentence in its true light” (Malte). Yet for Finja, on the other hand, smileys and emoticons are all about making feelings visible: “I find it always hard to write a smile. I mean by using words. But to put a colon and a parenthesis is not only a lot easier but way more effective” while Alex and Iris summarised the usage of emoticons in saying that “they are a great way for making the communication a lot easier” (Alex) and “helping to clarify how all this is meant that’s rushing over the screen within seconds” (Iris).

Besides the usage of emoticons, **pictures** accompanying the posted texts were seen as a very helpful tool to facilitate the right interpretation of the written words, too. As Romy said, for example, they are also “helping [me] to get into the mood, to get what the post really is about”. Slightly more than two thirds of all participants (11 out of 15, 74%) found examples of posts that wouldn’t have worked at all without their enclosed pictures. As in the case of another IKEA post (see figure 4.6.), Emma stated that, in spite of the usage of the winking smiley, she needed the picture to contextualise and understand the written words, saying “without the picture I wouldn’t get it”. In another

Figure 4.6: A post by IKEA Germany, saying: “Of course we also have some flower pots with a handle. ;)”

case, Herbert, who was struggling with a word he hadn't seen before, was only able to get what the company was trying to say by looking at the enclosed picture, too: "Ah, when you look at the picture then you see these little mowing robots. That's what they mean. If the picture wasn't with it, I would have never understood it." Iris mentioned a case in which the picture alone was enough to interpret the message the right way: "Precisely because I have the picture I don't need the smiley."

Besides the usage of emoticons, smileys and pictures, one last thing that was seen as a helpful and appropriate way to emotionalise and loosen up the communication in an easy way within Facebook was the usage of **echoism**, which is the written imitation of a sound. Although just three participants scrolled through examples that contained some form of echoism, all three of them found it very fitting within the fun and entertaining mode of communication they expect in the social network. Asked whether or not echoisms are bothering him, Gandalf answered "Oh no, not at all! 'Wow' or 'bang' or 'kaboom' or things like that could definitely be used everywhere here" while Finja just said "I find it appropriate within Facebook".

4.2.3.1. Discussion: The Meaning of Simplification

As a result of what has been discussed as the causal condition "Communication within Facebook" in section 4.2.2., which made clear that users are used to a certain style of communication and that they are often in a hurry while reading something within Facebook, the last section explained in detail what it means for the users to read posts and messages that are articulated and written in an easy and simple way – to make it as easy as possible for them to interpret the messages within seconds. Following, this strategy of simplification makes sense because it enriches and dumbs the process of the users interpretation. Instead of using a complicated, professional language and elements (e.g. hashtags) that the users are not used to among friends and within their private environment, the opposite – a language that feels much more like “colloquial speech” (Herbert) makes it a lot easier to interpret the posts within seconds.

Consequential, PR officers should avoid multi-clause sentences, long and complicated words and, first and foremost, a language that is too professional. Instead, they should post what they want to say using a language and words that are easy to understand because they are short, simple and close to the users everyday speech.

The users negative feeling of professional communication includes their antipathy towards hashtags, unknown product names and the usage of initials that identify the authors of the posts. All these means are things that are uncommon in personal communication and that feel unfamiliar to the users because they are neither part of the user’s private posts nor of the ones of their friends. As a result, their usage does not feel appropriate for the users.

What is part of this private world of communication within Facebook and what feels appropriate are emoticons. As Thurlow et al. (2004, p. 52) said, “it’s all about making the most of what’s available to foster a warm, friendly atmosphere”. As a result, it has become normal for the user to warm up their text-based Facebook communication by using emoticons to express their feelings, simplify the communicative process and socialise their written words (Baym, 2010; van Dijk, 2012). Emoticons are used to make clear that something is meant ironically or humorously or to show that the author is happy or sad about something. Used in the right way, they enrich the text, making it much easier to interpret the tonation and the meaning of the written words correctly. Therefore, it makes sense that they are welcome in organisational posts too, if they enrich the text-based communication, making it easier for the user to interpret the post correctly. Following, it is not surprising that this common and helpful usage of emoticons has led to their acceptance within corporate posts – at least if they fit into the context and help better understand what was meant to be said by the author of the post. If this is the case, emoticons are appropriate, too. In a similar way, pictures are another helpful element to facilitate the right interpretation of the written post because they help to get the context of what is written down.

However, there are several aspects, for example the aforementioned hashtags, initials and unknown product names, that are not only uncommon in the users private, communicate world but were also seen as sources of interference that make the interpretation more complicated because they present some form of what Fiske (1990) calls noise in the process of communication, something that distracts the users. In situations like these, the users were thinking about what these various hashtags or foreign product names mean instead of focusing on the text itself. Thus, all sources of interference affect the interpretation in a negative way. Because they make it harder to interpret the posts by distracting the user, they should be avoided – especially because text-based communication is already argued to be the most difficult form of communication (Reichertz, 2010; Rusch, 1994).

4.2.4. Intervening Conditions

While all these strategies were seen as logical steps to simplify the interpretation of text-based organisational communication within Facebook, interviewees stated that a few impacting variables should be considered by PR officers to meet their expectations of corporate communication within Facebook. These intervening conditions can be grouped into two main categories: first, the intervening condition that can be termed **complexity of online communication**, meaning that the users were aware of the aforementioned fact that communicating in an online world is much more complicated than communicating face-to-face and that all of the users have gained different levels of experience in how to communicate effectively in an online world. Secondly, there is the intervening condition that can be termed **organisation as sender**, which mainly refers to the user's awareness of the fact that, as friendly and casual as the corporate posts might be, it is still a company which is talking to them, not their private friends. These two intervening conditions are now explored in more detail.

4.2.4.1. Complexity of Online Communication

As mentioned previously, communicating in an online world is different compared to communicating face-to-face. While the latter is seen as the richest form of human communication (Thurlow et al., 2004), including a huge range of nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions and the usage of the human voice, all these nonverbal cues are missing in text-based online communication, making it harder to understand the written words the right way. These characteristics and differences of both online communication on the one hand and face-to-face communication on the other were intervening issues raised by all the participants who took part in this study. Speaking of the **lack of nonverbal cues**, six interviewees were directly using the term nonverbal communication to address this phenomenon, while all the other interviewees were paraphrasing the term using words like "gesture" (e.g. Leon, Manuela, Verena) or "facial expression" (e.g. Gandalf, Malte). However, despite the fact that they were using different words to describe it, they were articulating the lack of presence of the kind of nonverbal cues they are used to experiencing in simplifying their daily face-to-face communication. As Finja stated: “I'd say I'm someone who's using things like facial expressions of my counterpart a lot in the real world, because it's helping me to get the meaning. But speaking of the plain written words, for me there's really no big space for interpretation.” Leon and Gandalf discussed this phenomenon with statements like “It's just text, that's tricky” (Leon) or “without seeing my counterpart, that's, yeah, that's quite tricky. Personally, I've a big issue with it. Gestures, facial expression, that's all, well, it's giving you a lot to interpret.” For Herbert, this missing basis for classifying how something was meant to be said by someone is the core problem of interpreting text-based online communication, “because a written word can be read somehow or the other” and “everyone can understand it differently”. Thus misunderstandings and **misinterpretations** are sure to follow.

> “If you don't see each other and then read things on Facebook, well, it isn't easy. Because I think you're moving in a way ... [thinks] ... you don't know how the other person is going to take it, how this person will understand you. And in the end I might understand it right, but 15 out of 20 understand it wrong. Because written language is just really complicated, especially if it's about something emotional.” (Romy)

Felix noted that “people get digital communication wrong very quickly. It always comes with the risk of misinterpretation.” To avoid this misinterpretation and “challenge the interpreting of online communication” (Alex), Steffi and Malte mentioned that the most important thing is “to read very, very carefully” (Steffi), although Malte directly criticised his own statement with the thought that this strategy might collide with the fast-moving nature of Facebook discussed earlier. While other strategies will be discussed in the following sections, Friederike and Malte made clear that they are still having problems writing down their own thoughts appropriately themselves:

> "I have to say honestly that I can't express myself in written form, that's a big problem for me." (Friederike)

> "Often I find myself, when I'm writing something, that I correct myself like three times because I think, well, that word isn't right, but I don't find the right word (…) and actually I wanna say it differently but I couldn't say it with the right word. I mean, personally I think it's really hard to be happy with the written communication you do on Facebook. With the posts I wanna write on Facebook." (Malte)

Emoticons as Replacement for Facial Expression

To compensate for the recognised lack of nonverbal cues, e.g. the missing gestures, in online communication, 11 (74%) of the interviewees mentioned the usage of emoticons right at the beginning of the interviews by themselves. Asked how she is generally able to interpret messages in an online environment in spite of all the challenges, Romy answered: "There are these smileys on Facebook and for me they work quite well." On a similar question, Gandalf stated that he's trying "to use smileys and **emoticons instead of gestures** because they [the receivers] can't see his face while being on Facebook". If he wanted to smile to make clear something isn't meant as harshly as it might sound, he would add a smiling face emoticon :-) while writing something similar on Facebook, "equivalent to my face" (Gandalf). This is a usage all interviewees in this study agreed on, whereupon Peter puts it straight that these smileys are "indeed just usable for the simplest forms of emotions" like showing happiness, sympathy, sadness or irony, for example.

However, while several participants mentioned that the right interpretation of these smileys and emoticons is something they have learned over the years of their online experience (a phenomenon discussed in the following section), Emma said the following:

> “It’s quite funny: when my mom writes me a WhatsApp, she’s also sending some funny, little pictures [she means emoticons] which have absolutely no connection but she’s probably sending them just because she finds them beautiful at the moment and thought ‘Oh well, I’m sending these to her’. But I would say within my friends, it has a conscious, yeah, background.”

Although Finja made a very similar statement and even though she talked about her grandma instead of her mother and mentioned that both her **father and mother have started to use emoticons** and to understand how emoticons are used since both of them have a smartphone with WhatsApp nowadays, her first impression that the usage and interpretation of emoticons is a question of generation does not tally with the experience of both Friederike and Herbert, who are both in their sixties. They both were using smileys on purpose and were interpreting them the same way the younger participants did during the interviews.

Process of Learning & Experience

What both Friederike and Herbert made clear is that the ability to interpret smileys and emoticons has to do with the **degree of experience** in online communication, rather than one’s age. Iris, who is in her forties, for example, said that she had been “part of an online chat for a while where half of the communication happens by using all kinds of dopey or less-dopey smileys”. Asked how they have learned to interpret and use smileys and emoticons, Verena and Malte even drew a comparison to the process of learning how to use body language. The way they have learned that something is shining in another light when it is said with crossed arms or a wrinkled nose, is similar to the way they have learned that something could affect their interpretation of online messages, too. As an example, Malte mentioned the usage of a semicolon, a hyphen and a right parenthesis:

> "Then it's the easy hint made out of two or three characters that says: 'I don't mean it that deadly seriously, how it's written here. Put a little irony in it and then you'll understand how I meant it.'"

In this context, Verena also mentioned that all her expectations of how to communicate appropriately in an organisational context on Facebook are based on and measured by the **experience** she has gained so far within Facebook, a phenomenon several other participants agreed on in some way, by saying things like "it's just how you do it on Facebook" (Verena), "it's confusing me because I'm used to a different form of communication here" (Alex) or simply "it's normal on Facebook" (Herbert). Similarly to the judgement of whether or not the wording is appropriate, some interviewees even mentioned that some terms and phrases are only understood based on experience, too. While Iris, Steffi and Alex, for example, all referred to the usage of old, funny sayings which made it clear to them "that the post is meant in an ironic, funny way" (Iris), Finja used the term experience to describe her process of contextualisation and filtration:

> "I check who has posted it and then I can say yes, that's okay or no that is weird or seems unusual. So based on the experience I have with the company I will sort it myself."

Following all these statements about the role of the users' experiences in interpreting and judging online communication, it became clear how important it is for PR officers to think carefully about the level of experience their audience might have, to decide whether or not something might be understood by their audience.

However, during the analysis an interesting finding emerged: even interviewees like Finja, Manuela and Iris who, at the beginning, generally were sceptical about the usage of emoticons in organisational posts were **reconsidering this point of view** during the course of the interview. Specifically, the more private and corporate posts they consciously scrolled through, the more they liked the benefit these emoticons gave to the corporate posts.

4.2.4.2. Organisation as Sender

As mentioned above, another aspect that was seen as an additional intervening condition is the fact that all participants of this study were aware that every corporate post is published in the name of a company, not in the name of an individual. As a result, 100% of the interviewees stated that there is a clear border; that they still want to see a **difference between friends and organisations**.

In addition to her statement "personal, but not like best buddies" presented earlier in this chapter, Finja asked the question "why should I allow Tchibo [a German coffee roaster] to be as close and personal as my best friends?". By saying that, she was referring to what Alex called "clear differences" of how some of his friends might write something in a funny mood or maybe even drunken state – for example using slang words – and the way an organisation is speaking on Facebook. Manuela noted:

> "It's still a company. I don't want them to speak like my best friends. I don't want them to speak, don't know, like we're best friends for about thirty years, went through thick and thin and so on. Here, for example, this 'Are you in?', for me that's really a lot too chummy."

For her this "chummy" slang is a step too far; something that about half (54%) of the participants agreed on. As Herbert said, organisations should always preserve some degree of seriousness in form and content.

> "The company kind of wants to represent itself right? And if, I would say, the whole company would use slang like how my friends and I use it, without any kind of difference, that wouldn't work. Right? I don't mind how my friends write on Facebook but I do mind how a company writes."

As an additional example, Iris mentioned the non-expectable usage of minimisation to make words sound more likable: “That’s really a bit too silly. Where are we? There’s really a normal word for that.”

Respectable, Serious Language – without Mistakes

Although organisations are communicating within a network that is known for its loose, casual, colloquial language among friends, they should still keep “a certain standard” (Alex) within their usage of words and language. As Leon noted, “even though they are using Facebook to reach me, they should still appear professional using a **respectable language**”. Despite the welcome usage of echoism discussed earlier and the fact that he welcomes a young, fresh language on Facebook, too, he went on to say that he is “for example absolutely no fan of slang words” or even abbreviations “like LOL, YOLO or whatever” in organisational posts, a view that a quarter of the participants agreed on. Like two thirds of all interviewees, Finja saw a reason for all these differences in the fact that the author behind the organisational message is unknown to her: “I don’t know the one who was sitting behind the desk writing the post, so my expectations are a bit different, that is, yeah, they are a bit higher.” To describe what Finja simply named “higher”, a lot of participants repeatedly pointed to the importance of the **right spelling** and the usage of **grammar and punctuation**. While Malte simply said that he “really cares about the right spelling” and Emma that she’s “paying attention to the spelling and that there’s a full stop behind every sentence”, Iris was more direct:

> “What I really don’t like are those dramatic misspellings or grammatical mistakes in posts. When my friend makes a mistake, so what? Then she just mistyped it. But if it’s happening on the official Facebook page that represents the company in some way, then everything comes up. That’s a no-go.”

Rejecting Excessive Emotionalisation

A last finding that connects to both the participants' desire for a difference between their friends' posts and the ones the organisations are publishing on the one hand, and the core phenomenon of appropriateness on the other, is the **rejection of excessive emotionalisation**. Using phrases like "too emotional" (Leon), "tugs too much on one's heart strings" (Manuela) or "I don't need 30 smileys" (Malte), almost all interviewees of this study mentioned examples of exceeding an invisible but important border. Especially Malte's statement quoted above connects directly the preference for "very, very economical" usage of emoticons mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, Steffi, Malte and Alex referred to a phenomenon that they saw as a direct result of an exaggerated usage of emotions and emoticons.

> "Well, I think it has to fit perfectly and, well, for example smileys shouldn't be used too much. Just because it is, well, it loses the serious character a little. I mean they somehow try to inform about something that they find important for me, right? But if they just show exaggerated emotions and fun, I don't know. That doesn't fit, I think." (Steffi)

Repeatedly it was noted that the strong smiling face – :-D – and especially the heart emoticon were seen as the ones which the participants themselves wouldn't have used that often, although some female interviewees did like the heart emoticon. Felix stated, however, that these emoticons were often seen as "just not helping with the interpretation" and in addition "not that authentic or a bit over the top" if used in corporate posts that didn't need emotionalisation.

4.2.4.3. Discussion: The Meaning of Organisational Online Communication

Although both, the phraseology and the general usage of language (simple, easy words; close to the users 'everyday speech') within Facebook might lead to a communicative process that feels more personal and – in terms of the chosen words – closer to the users communication in "real life" (Steffi), the users are aware of the face that this communication is still happening in an online environment where especially text can be problematic if used wrong. More generally spoken, the complexity of text-based communication in an online environment is something that the users are aware of. They know that text could be misinterpreted (Reichertz, 2010; Misoch, 2006) and that the lack of nonverbal cues makes it even harder to interpret a written sentence correctly (Thurlow et al., 2004; Baym, 2010).

However, as Walther (1992) assumed with the introduction of his social information processing model (see section 2.3.4.5.) after the rise of the Internet, SNS and the usage of computer-mediated communication, users have learned how to handle this communication and experienced ways to make both communication and interpretation easier in this environment. First, they hinted at the importance of the aforementioned emoticons as a replacement for facial expressions.

Secondly, the user's knowledge and experience of how to communicate within the SNS affects the interpretation of a certain message, too. The experience someone has with online communication helps this person to think more critically about the written words and their exact meaning, knowing from his or her experience that text-based communication can be different. This experience makes the user used to helpful tools such as the aforementioned emoticons.

However, even though the users experience of how to communicate and especially of how to interpret messages within Facebook helps a lot on the one hand, it does not mean that PR officers should write and post everything the way a private user would write and post it. For the researcher this differentiation makes sense. The users made clear that there is a certain border the organisations should not cross. Although they stated that they prefer a phraseology and language that is close to their own private tone and style of communication within Facebook, they are aware of the fact that every corporate post is written by an organisation and not by their close, personal friends. Thus, as close and as private as the social network may be, they are still differentiating between corporate and private posts and are still expecting some distance from the organisation that is posting something. As Manuela stated: "It's still a company. I don't want them to speak like my best friends." The benchmark of whether or not the language used within a corporate post is appropriate is therefore different. For the researcher it also makes sense that the users are not ignoring spelling or grammar mistakes as easily as they do in posts their friends have published. The users know that there is a professional on the other side of the computer, and thus they expect a certain amount of quality. They expect PR officers to know and to use the correct spelling, the correct grammar and the correct punctuation to produce a language that can be seen as serious. This seriousness is underlined by the users' rejection of a language that is too childish, too emotional or simply too close. As abbreviations such as LOL were originally used to speed up the typing and creation of a message (Werry, 1996), these elements do not fit into an organisational post because the users expect the organisation, or rather the PR professional, to have the time it needs to type the full words. In addition, both abbreviations and emoticons are elements that have become very normal in the world of CMC, but especially within organisational use they should only be applied if they fit into the context and make the interpretation much easier. In addition, users also made clear that they do not want organisations to use smileys and emoticons just because they are parts of the users' online environment. As Malte stated by saying "I don't need 30 smileys", this form of excessive emotionalisation is too much in an organisational post and it makes sense that the users reject this excessive usage of emoticons and that it does not feel appropriate at all.

4.2.5. Context: Individual Relevance & Expectations

Knowing the full context of why the interviewees were seeing and interpreting certain posts differently is an important criterion in addressing this project's research question. In addition to the intervening and causal conditions presented earlier in this chapter, the **individual relevance** a post might have for the user and the user's expectations about the company or the brand that is publishing the post were seen as most important points of contextualisation to judge if the organisation has met the expectations of the user and to judge if the post is seen as an appropriate one for the user or not.

Repeatedly, all interviewees noticed some posts they just did not like because of the content of these posts. By saying things like "the content has to be meaningful" (Steffi), "it should make sense for me, in a way" (Alex), "it's not interesting to me, I don't have time for that" (Malte), "I don't need it, so let's go on reading" (Finja) or "it's less interesting for me" (Herbert) they made clear that they do not want to be bothered by something they did not ask for, as Alex clearly articulated: "I think there is nothing worse than nonsense posts just to post something every two days." Additionally, all interviewees who participated in this study stated that they just want to see posts which are relevant in some way. However, while the question of content itself was not the focus of this dissertation, these findings are still of value because they were the entry into another, important phenomenon. All interviewees also stated that in the same way they do not like to see posts they are not interested in, they really like to see posts which are individually, and substantially, relevant to them. Finja called this phenomenon "individual relevance", saying that her current interest in specific companies, topics, brands or products is affecting whether or not she cares about the posts the companies publish and how carefully these posts are interpreted by her. This individual context, which changes the whole context of the user's interpretation, will be discussed in the following sections.

Signal Words

Speaking about the individual relevance and the individual interpretation of certain posts, one thing that became clear very early in this study was the role and relevance of **signal words**. While it has been discussed above that both the interpretation and selection of posts happen within seconds, almost all interviewees (12 out of 15) referred to some words that helped them to decide whether or not to read a certain post. For example, Emma drew attention to a post that included the word "Hamburg" and Peter was affected by posts that included the words "luxurious", "holiday", or "summer".

> "Those are all signal words that match somehow to my personal life. That means, if I'll notice and read them while scanning through, I know it's interesting for me. Or when I read 'Business Class' in this particular example, I know it's just not interesting to me. So it's driven really personally by what's interesting for me and what isn't."

Verena, on the other hand, was emotionally caught by the phrase "childhood memory" while Romy was affected by the phrase "springtime fever" and Felix's interest was sparked by the term "product recall". Summarising, all these examples make clear that besides the names and logos of the brands, products or companies, certain words and phrases were signalling the individual importance a post might have for the user. Or as Herbert put it: "I think I'm just attracted by certain words. And, yeah, if it's something that's of interest for me, I'll go read it."

Thematic Interest

Whether or not a signal word, the corporation, or the brand behind the post, or even an enclosed picture, was generating attention, all interviewees mentioned in some way that the **topic** discussed in the post itself matters a lot. While Romy, for example, just said “oh yeah, that’s cool. That’s about something for my godchild” while reading a post, Emma said that loving a company does not automatically mean that every kind of content would be acceptable: “Either there’s at least interest about what they’re saying from my side or I just skip it.” Gandalf agreed with this. While scrolling through and scanning some posts of Media Markt, a German electronic retailer, which was just posting special offers, he stated: “It’s just the facts about some random offers. And it’s not even funny or something. Just offers and I don’t need them.” Malte, on the other hand, found an example of a product post that he did not like not because of the product itself, but because of the way this post was made. In an entertaining, short and easy way the Italian pasta manufacturer Barilla was focusing on one of their new pestos by using two different pictures of the same product and simply asking: “So, who can spot the difference?” As a reaction, Malte stated:

> “That’s such a classic. I like it and find it funny. It is fun and you can do it by the way. And with the little ‘So’ at the beginning of the question they casually ask me to deal with the product, the company, you know?”

However, Barilla not only found a way to create interest but was also using the right, short and direct language Malte preferred and described as casual. Finja and several other participants mentioned that if the topic is interesting enough, the language becomes less important: “I love books. So I think they could post what and say what they want how they want it. As long as it’s not totally off the mark, I won’t care.”

Differentiation According to Commercial Sector and Product

In addition to the thematic interest, all interviewees but one (94%) made clear that the **commercial** sector or the **product** itself are affecting users' expectations about how to speak appropriately within Facebook. Only Gandalf said that he did not differentiate, wanting the same kind of appropriate causality for all commercial sectors and products. The other 14 participants used some form of the word differentiation to underline the view that different commercial sectors need a different language. Manuela and Iris, for example, were using the same words to describe without ambiguity that the phraseology of the post has to match "with the message the company wants to sell", while Alex and Steffi said that they were mentioning the appropriateness "on the basis of the product they want to merchandise" (Steffi) and "on the basis of what the organisation stands for" (Alex). Malte summarised all this with the simple view that "it just has to fit".

Asked what exactly makes the difference between a casual, intimate phraseology among friends and the organisational one that should be a little bit more distanced, Alex and Herbert stated that it all has to do with the "**responsibility**" (Alex) "**earnestness**" (Herbert) or even the "**reliability**" (Felix) the company, the product or the whole sector behind the post stands for. Accordingly, all interviewees used words and phrases like "giant company" (Friederike, Steffi, Emma), "big, traditional, German firm" (Finja), "respectable organisation" (Leon, Verena, Alex), "huge, international group" (Iris) or something similar to describe the organisations that should generally be more careful when deciding how to 'speak' within Facebook. An example that ran like a common thread through all the interviews was the one of banks, insurance companies and – in about half of the interviews – energy providers. Alex noted that:

> "For example if we talk about a bank, I commit my money to this bank, that's important for me because it's a big responsibility to handle my money. But if we talk about a company that sells chocolate, for example, I don't need this seriousness. Of course I have to trust them, too, in the sense that they produce this chocolate right, but they are allowed to joke around with me. Compared to my bank and the business I have with this bank." (Alex)

> "The Postbank is for me, well, it's a difference if we talk about a serious bank or a company that sells everyday goods. The latter is trying to do everything to get my attention. No matter how. But the bank is still a serious institution like an insurance company that shouldn't come with a language that's too casual or something, just to look hip. For a bank, something else counts. It counts that they are safe and that my money is well-invested. So that's distinguishing my expectations of a company." (Leon)

While Leon was unconsciously summarising what all 14 users were talking about, Verena pointed attention to a phenomenon that can be seen as the result of what has been discussed so far. In line with Leon's perspective, she stated that banks, insurance companies and energy providers have "to do the splits". Thus, "they shouldn't be too sloppy on the one hand, even though they have to try to be a bit more casual on the other. Although they might talk about credits and stuff" (Verena). Compared to these serious companies, she also mentioned why she finds it appropriate for the other organisations to use a phraseology that is a lot more casual: "So if we talk about a drug store, for example: I buy my sanitary products there and not my stocks, that's why they're welcome to talk to me in a more casual way."

Closeness & Sympathy

Even though 14 of the 15 participants were referring to banks, insurance companies and energy providers, Manuela and Felix both mentioned another commercial sector that should stay as distanced as the banks: the automotive industry. Manuela argued that Ford, the car manufacturer she was scrolling through, "is just talking about a car. That's just a thing" while Felix said "Audi is far beyond my financial reach". Yet, Emma introduced a fifth example, comparing the shampoo manufacturer Dove with its holding company Unilever: "I think if I would follow Unilever on Facebook, I would expect a totally different language compared to the one I expect from Dove. Dove can be much more casual."

While all these statements and thoughts about banks, insurance companies, energy providers, Ford, Audi and Unilever might not look connected to each other in the first instance, there is one thing they all have in common: all these companies are selling goods or services that were not within reach or that were not part of the real, daily life of the participants. In contrast, Felix and Steffi both used the term "**everyday commodities**" to describe the products that they think are within reach and could be engaged with through a more casual phraseology. Iris referred to the example of a sun cream manufacturer, which she saw as one company that is allowed to be more casual, too. However, all these organisations are producers of things that are part of and **present within the daily** life of the users and that, as a consequence, are much closer to the users than insurance, shares, expensive cars or holding companies.

This particular importance of this **closeness** to companies, brands and products the participants are using within their daily life became especially apparent in situations where the interviewees were talking about brands or products they **trust and care about.** The 64-year-old Friederike, for example, was passionate about a specific kind of tea. While scrolling through a post of this tea company published on Facebook, she said: "Oh, that's my tea. I've been drinking this tea for ages and I'd say if they are posting something, no matter what it is, I'll become weak and just like it." Similar examples were found in all interviews that were part of this study. Romy, for example, was "loving McDonalds", Emma identified herself with IKEA and Ben & Jerrys, Finja called herself a fan of Mayersche (a German reseller of books), Peter and Manuela were passionate about Nutella and Milka and Alex stated that he has "a certain sympathy" for Tchibo. Yet, during the interviews, Manuela became aware that she is much **less critical of the language**, phraseology and style used in posts of companies she cares about than the ones she doesn't like that much. In one situation she was scrolling through a post of the German chocolate manufacturer Milka – as a reminder, a company she loves – that contained an emoticon. Because she was scrolling through a similar post of Garnier – a brand she does not like that much – some minutes before, she now started to think self-critically about the usage of emoticons, saying: "That's odd. On Garnier's post the emoticon was bothering me, here in Milka's example it's totally fine." Asked about how she feels about Garnier, she just answered: "I feel closer to Milka." Similar examples were seen in other interviews, too: while Verena was scrolling through a post of Miracoli and did not care about some points she had criticised in other posts before ("It's Miracoli, it's about pasta. Actually, I might be a bit prejudiced here."), Romy allowed McDonalds to say whatever they want. "Oh well, that's McDonalds. I just love McDonalds."

On the other hand, Felix, Gandalf and Verena were talking about the opposite using examples of companies, brands and products they do not like. As an example, Gandalf summarised the whole effect sympathy or lack of sympathy has on his expectations as follows:

> "It always has something to do with sympathy, right? If I like a company, it's all not a big deal. But if I don't like them for some reason, whatever the reason might be, O2 [a phone company], for example, they probably know how to use Facebook and might use smileys and so on. But because I find them dislikeable from scratch, they could do whatever they want, I'll probably find it shitty. They could stand on their head and laugh, it wouldn't change anything." (Gandalf)

Expectations

An important influence on contextualisation were the different **expectations** the participants had about the organisations behind the posts. As well as the aforementioned perspective that "it just has to fit" (Malte), all interviewees talked about aspects that had influenced their expectations about what appropriateness means for different companies. Using statements like "it's the IKEA image you know" (Emma), "typical BOSCH" (Herbert), "it matches with Kinder Surprise" (Verena), "that's McDonalds" (Romy) or "the way of life Tchibo stands for" (Iris), it became clear that the brands the user has come across before were judged by what this user thought about this particular brand so far. In a comparative example, Emma stated the following:

> "For example, if I go to ALDI around the corner, I'm kind of expecting this, well, I expect it to be a little bit messy there because it's a discounter. It's cheap. And so I won't expect a clever-clever language here on Facebook. But on the other side of my house there's EDEKA [a German supermarket] where it's tidy and clean and nice and they have a lot of employees. So, well, what I'm trying to say is that the appearance here and in the stores, it has to fit in some way. That's why I have different expectations here on Facebook."

In this context, Manuela, Felix, Malte and Iris highlighted that especially popular brands and organisations should be careful in deciding how to speak online. "If their language is not measuring up to my expectations, it'd have a negative impact for me" (Manuela). However, a third of the interviewees put the focus on another, much more positive, effect that is entailed in **pre-built expectations**. According to Finja, it is sometimes "easier to get a message the right way" if you know **what the organisation stands** for or what the company cares about. Emma used IKEA and its radio adverts as an example: "If you have in mind how the funny guy in the ad is talking with his Swedish accent, you know, that's so cordial and nice. And if you then read the post in that context, that's helping a little, too."

Added Value

As mentioned briefly above, although all users generally preferred posts that are "short and simple" (Emma), 10 participants made one exception to this rule. If there was a **reasonable added value** for a longer post or a different language, for example **certain sympathy** or a **deep interest in the topic**, they all were fine with this alternative.

While for most of the interviewees their aforementioned deeper interest in a specific topic was enough to justify a longer post, Verena found an example with a more serious subject: "Right at the beginning IKEA said 'Bring us back'. It's a warning notice about a manufacturing error, kids could be strangled. In this case I absolutely don't care about length or anything." However, Malte stated that even in cases like this the post should be written in a proper language, including "a crispy beginning" and the usage of signal words to get the user's attention within seconds: "The essential information should still be recognised immediately."

4.2.5.1. Discussion: The Meaning of Individual Relevance & Expectations

Besides the user's general wish of simplicity, objectivity and some last distance between the organisation and the private user discussed within the first half of this chapter, the last section made clear that there are also contextualising factors that are influencing the user's feeling of appropriateness. Findings that differentiate organisations, allowing one organisation to speak in a tone and style that is more private. As mentioned above, the participants of this study stated that their judgement of whether or not a written post feels appropriate depends on their personal interest in the product, the organisation or the topic the post is about and on their individual expectations. Therefore, a high individual relevance, for example for a particular topic that is discussed within the post, affects the linguistic expectation of the interested user, making the language and phraseology used less important compared to the one in a post that is seen as less interesting or less relevant for the same user. In connection with this contextualising phenomenon it makes sense that signal words are helping the user to decide whether or not to read a post. First because of the aforementioned lack of time while scrolling through their Facebook News Feed, but secondly because these signal words are directly and easily pointing out the users' individual relevance of a certain post respectively a certain topic.

In addition, especially organisations or brands that the user feels connected to or close to and that he or she trusts in and cares about because of a particular sympathy have a much easier job in choosing the right words and the right tonation within their Facebook posts. Because of this closeness and sympathy, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section, users are less critical about the language and phraseology used within the posts of these close, sympathetic organisations and overlook things they would criticise in other organisational posts, for example an additional emoticon. Brands and organisations the user really cares about and that are part of his or her daily life do not feel as anonymous as the other organisations. The user has started to develop positive feelings about this organisation or this brand which moves the user's judgement and expectations about language and phraseology closer to the ones he or she has about the posts of personal friends within the social network, something that does not happen with organisations the user does not feel so close to. As a result, the relationship between the organisation and the user is affecting the judgement of appropriate communication and language (van Dijk, 2012; Reichertz; 2010; Hard af Segerstad, 2002). However, this does not mean that in these cases the language and phraseology used within the post is completely unimportant. As Friederike stated, it still "has to fit with the topic discussed within the post". Furthermore, there is also a significant difference in judging an appropriate language based on the fact about what – for example about which product or about which commercial sector – the organisation is posting. While for the researcher it makes sense that an reasonable added value (e.g. a deep thematic interest or a warning notice) could justify a slightly longer post and make the language used within the post less important, it is interesting how interviewees were thinking about different sectors and products. Especially banks, insurance companies and energy providers are seen as organisations that have to be more careful in deciding what style and tone they use within the social network. Their sectors and products stand for a high level of seriousness and they are dealing with important parts of the user's life – while they are not as tangible as the user's favourite food brand, for example. Thus, the expectations are different. As one interviewee said, all these respectable, serious and distanced organisations have "to do the splits" (Verena). On the one hand they have to use a phraseology that fits into the user's aforementioned private, casual world of Facebook communication, but on the other they have to fulfil the user's expectations of a serious, respectable language that represents this serious, reliable organisation.

As another contextualising variable, the user's knowledge and pre-built expectations about the organisation that is posting something on Facebook affects the user's interpretation and his or her judgement of appropriateness, too. The users read and interpret the text of the post based on what they know about the organisation and on what they think the organisation stands for. This context influences the interpretation of the text based on what is learned and known about the organisation so far. All this connects to previous knowledge about interpretation and communication. Both organisation (sender) and user (receiver) have a shared meaning of what they are talking about (Fawkes, 2012; Burkart, 2002; Bruner & Olson 1973) and the user is able to use his or her background knowledge to make sense of what he or she has read (Cornbleet & Carter, 2011). In addition, the different expectations between the posts of different organisations connect to the finding of Henning and Hunt (1975). Although they found that the reader's expectation of a written text depends on his or her thoughts about and the experience he or she has had with this medium, the researcher sees a similarity between the expectations about a certain text genre in a certain media and the expectations of a certain phraseology used by a certain organisation which the user has read and thought about before. As a result, especially brands that are very well known, for example IKEA or McDonald's, should carefully think what kind of language the user expects them to use.

4.2.6. Consequences of the Process

As in any process, the interplay of the five elements discussed above - central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, intervening conditions and context – leads to a theoretical outcome. These consequences, which are the part of the grounded theory coding paradigm, will be discussed within this section.

In line with the main research question of how users want to be addressed in a PR-driven social media environment and the central phenomenon of appropriateness that has emerged throughout the process of analysis, it is not surprising that the main consequence of the aforementioned process is a form of communication that fulfils the users' expectations within Facebook – a form that is appropriate because it fits into the environment of the social network and makes the users **feel addressed**

within seconds. However, as this appropriate form of communication (which has been discussed in detail in section 4.2.1.) is using a tone and style close to the users' private form of communication within Facebook, there is one additional consequence: in many cases, participants stated that this "close-to-private" (Peter) form of organisational communication led to some sort of general **closeness, identification and sympathy** for the organisation – something which can be seen as an important conclusion for public relations. These two consequences will be presented below.

4.2.6.1. Feeling addressed within seconds

As mentioned above, it is not a surprise that one result of following the process of appropriate communication is a **feeling of being addressed** and being **able to interpret corporate posts within seconds**. Both during interviewing the participants and analysing the posts participants claimed to like, it became clear that all users liked a very similar kind of post. They liked short posts that were written in the appropriate, friendly style discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Asked about why they loved these particular posts, participants answered with phrases like "it's easy, you can read it in the blink of an eye" (Emma), "they are all written in their purest form" (Peter), "you can catch it quickly" (Finja), "it's just easy to read" (Romy), "I can implement it in my head within seconds" or "they are all written short and crispy, that is, they are using words out of my daily life that are easy to understand and they are making it easy for me to read the whole thing along the way" (Malte). Besides these first statements, which were mostly about simplicity and the fast-moving nature of interpretation within Facebook, 12 out of 15 interviewees (80%) also referred to the **friendly phraseology** used in the posts they loved. Friederike, for example, was scrolling through a few posts she claimed to like while saying: “You’re just feeling addressed differently. They are using such a nice, direct, friendly language that’s just making you feel like you know each other.” While Malte and Leon justified their feeling of being addressed by repeating their statements that all the posts were using a phraseology that “just fits” within Facebook, Iris argued that:

> “Because I really felt addressed. I mean yeah, it’s just about recipes and they are not that important, but regardless of the content it fits really well how they say it. I really felt addressed by the language.” (Iris)

In contrast, Emma was comparing the posts she stated to love with the ones she stated not to like that much. While looking at one post of BASF she did not like at all, she said: “I just don’t feel addressed. It’s so strange and, well, different to what I’m used to on Facebook. This formality. No, it’s just weird and not what I expect on Facebook.”

4.2.6.2. Closeness, Identification & Sympathy

Right within one of the first interviews Peter was scrolling through a post which he described as written in a form that “feels very private, in a good way” and “like we are hand in glove”. These first statements were later seen as a hint of a characteristic that all interviewees of this study referred to in some way: they felt appropriately addressed by posts that were written in a form they are used to because they or their friends would write it in a very similar way. As one example, Steffi’s reaction to the post presented in figure 4.1. – which multiple interviewees liked – was the following:

> “It’s more like, ehm, taken from real life. Like I would sit at some table, have these things standing in front of me and I would just post it. That’s exactly what I think is appealing because I believe I would write the same way.”

In another example (see figure 4.7.), Malte stated "well, that's written like you'd write it yourself, like a private person" while Gandalf, more generally, described his feelings about the posts he loved the most during the interview as follows: "They're all the same from the style, and yeah, that's how my mates would write it too if they would post something about the food or stuff." Because of this closeness to his friends, he considered these posts as personally made for him, a feeling Malte felt, too, in the example presented above, saying:

> "Here with these Barilla posts I feel somehow a bit closer to Barilla, I have to be honest. Because I have the feeling that, well, that they are really talking to me directly as a person, I mean, directly. As if we were totally close, I'd say."

While this **closeness** Malte and Gandalf were referring to was mentioned and desired by 8 interviewees, Emma and all the other participants even stated that they could identify themselves with a post if it is really written in a way that somehow connects to them. For example, she was scrolling through another post of IKEA which came with a picture that was all black. After reading the text, she said: "It's just written so funny and relaxed, that's really speaking to me and I like it a lot. That fits to IKEA and that fits to me." In a very similar case, Steffi added that in these situations a click on the Like button would be very easy because she has already **identified** herself with the post. Statements like this lead to a closer look and a comparative analysis of the posts the users claimed to like and the ones they claimed not to like that much. The result confirmed what the

Figure 4.7: A post by Barilla, saying: "Spring in Italy." :-)

aforementioned participants already articulated: all of the posts that were written in a way the users reacted positively to had in common that the organisations were using a very simple, friendly, casual and close phraseology that was either entertaining, funny or amusing. They all were posts that could have been published 1:1 on the private Facebook profiles of their friends.

As a final result of this appropriate communication, all participants stated that this appropriateness could also affect and change the image a user has of a company and lead to some kind of new **sympathy**:

> "If they are always communicating that appropriately, then yeah, I think that my whole image of the brand would change. Yeah definitely." (Leon)

> "I'd say the language is making a difference, especially the language is a crucial point to me. Of course, a picture is important, too, but more for the content. And if that picture was bad or ugly, I would even lay a special eye on the linguistic formulation." (Malte)

> "If I have, for example, a company that's – like Tchibo – likeable and that is using an appropriate language, the value would rise even more. But if I have a company that I already don't like and that is using a language that I see as not appropriate or that even has a lot of mistakes in it, then this negative feeling is increasing, too." (Alex)

While this development might be a very welcome one for all organisations that are using Facebook as a tool to reach their target group, Alex finished his statement with an important addition:

> "But I think it's all happening in **small steps**. I don't believe that they would do a complete image change just because of the language they are using on Facebook. And the way up is harder than the way down. Although I still have the expectations that the companies are using Facebook and that they are trying to address me as appropriately as possible." (Alex)

4.2.6.3. Discussion: The Meaning of the Consequences

As mentioned earlier in this section, it is no astonishment that the main consequence of the process of appropriate communication leads to a feeling of closeness, identification and sympathy. By using Facebook the right way – which means appropriate in the eyes of the private users – the organisation fulfils the users' expectations of a language and phraseology that fits into the fast-moving, complicated and mostly private CMC environment of Facebook while keeping in mind that there is still a difference between the organisation and the private users. However, the outcome is a language that is not only "pure" (Peter) and easy to interpret within seconds, it is a phraseology that the users are used to within the SNS and that fits into the environment of Facebook. Thus, it makes sense that this appropriate form of communication is leading to some kind of closeness, identification and sympathy because it feels like something is shared and said "between friends" (Manuela), written in a way the users could have written it themselves.

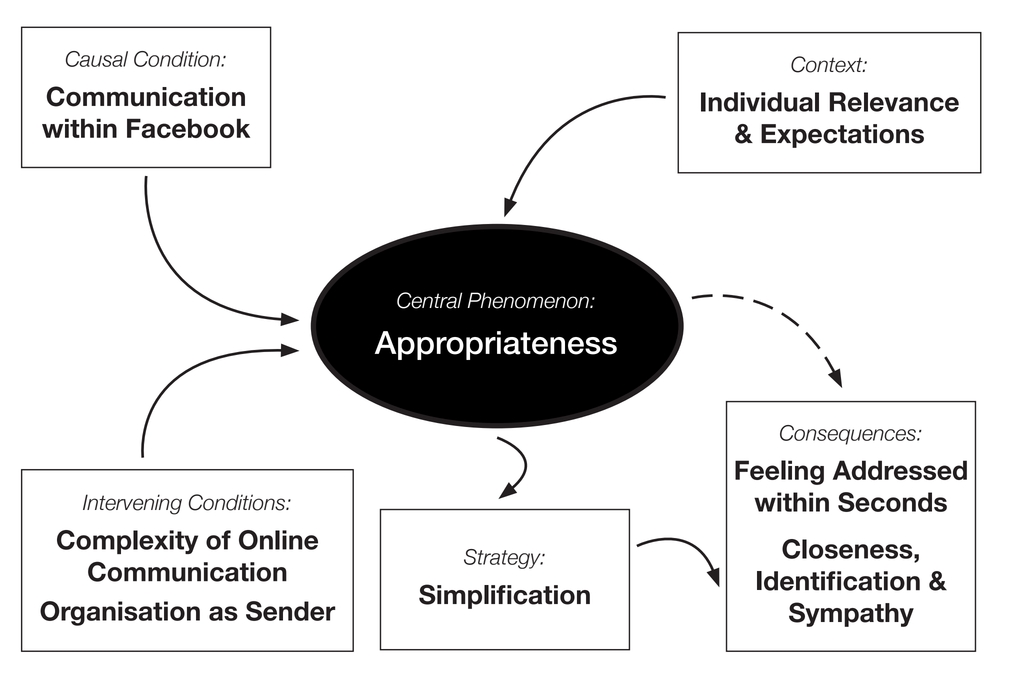
What is interesting though in the developed theory and model of appropriateness is the connection between sympathy and appropriateness. As mentioned earlier above (see section 4.2.5.), on the one hand users are less critical about the usage of language and phraseology in posts of organisations they sympathise with. On the other hand, repeatedly well-written, appropriate posts of an organisation they do not feel as close and sympathetic to in the first place are stated to have the ability of affecting the organisation's image in a positive way - which is leading to a new feeling of sympathy towards this brand or organisation. While this process of generating sympathy by using an appropriate language is happening in small steps and needs time, it, however, finally leads to the paradox that – while well-written, appropriate posts affect the user's sympathy in a positive way – after a certain point this sympathy might be strong enough to make the language and phraseology of the same organisation less important for the user, who has now become a sympathiser.

4.3. The Theory of User-Oriented Appropriateness

After a detailed review and discussion of the participants' responses, thoughts and feelings about PR communication within Facebook has been presented, it is now time to connect all elements discussed separately above and look at the process of appropriate communication in its entirety. The result of this process, the emergent theory of user-oriented appropriateness, is repeatedly presented in figure 4.8.

The model, which is based on the grounded theory coding paradigm shown in the methodology chapter (see figure 3.4., p. 97), represents the process of appropriate communication by naming its central phenomenon and showing the interconnected characteristics that are influencing the users' judgement of whether or not a post is seen as appropriate.

4.8. The Model of the "Theory of User-Oriented Appropriateness"



Thus, *appropriateness* is identified as the heart, the central phenomenon, of the presented model, whereby appropriateness stands for the users' desire of a phraseology that is private, personal, direct, familiar, easy to understand and "between friends" on the one hand while still objective and with some distance on the other. The users' way of *communication within Facebook* has been identified as the causal condition that is leading to the central phenomenon. This refers to the typical, colloquial, emotional, entertaining and easy language between friends the users are used to within Facebook while reading the messages alongside. As a result, it is *simplification* that is needed to make the interpretation as easy as possible, using an everyday language and assistance in interpretation while keeping the messages short and avoiding sources of interference, for example hashtags or unknown words. The intervening conditions *complexity of online communication* and *organisation as sender* have then been presented to show that the users are aware of the fact that corporate communication within Facebook is different compared to other forms of communication, including the one among their friends, and that they have learned to handle this form of online communication, for example in using emoticons to show feelings and enrich the online communication. However, this part of the theory also refers to the need of some last distance and difference because the users are expecting differences between friends and organisations. *Expectations* have also been a part of the context in which the posts are happening, together with the *individual relevance* a post might have for the user. While signal words were found to be helpful in deciding whether or not there is a thematic interest or an added value for the user that might, for example, judge a longer post, differences according to the commercial sector or the product that the post is talking about were also affecting the users' judgement of whether or not a certain post phraseology and language is appropriate, as well as the expectations, sympathy and closeness the users had or felt about the organisations before reading the post. Finally, a *feeling of being addressed within seconds* and new possible feelings of *closeness, identification and sympathy* are presented as the final consequence of the process of user-oriented appropriateness.

4.4. Summary and Conclusion

While it was the main goal of this study to examine how the users want to be addressed in the context of PR in the social network Facebook and to develop a theoretical understanding of what characteristics affect the user's interpretation and judgement whether the PR professional has used the right language and phraseology, it was the purpose of this chapter to present and directly discuss the results of the research project and illuminate the process of theory development. Following grounded theory analysis, axial coding and selective coding were used to build the grounded theory model of user-oriented appropriateness.

Results show that it all depends on the user's feeling of an appropriate usage of language and phraseology when deciding if he or she feels addressed or not. To make this process as easy as possible, it was discussed what appropriateness is for the interviewees and why this appropriateness is necessary in a fast-moving online environment where the users are used to communicating between friends. As another result, strategies that make it easier for the users to interpret the messages were presented. After that, the intervening conditions, that is the complexity of online communication in general and the fact that the users were aware that corporate PR posts are published by organisations and not by their best friends, were illuminated before presenting some points that are affecting the appropriateness, such as the individual relevance a post might have for the user, the sympathy for the organisation that is posting the message or the expectations about how a certain organisation is saying something on Facebook. As the consequence of this process, both the participants' feelings of being addressed within seconds and the chance of generating closeness, identification and sympathy for the brand or the organisation were described, before the emergent theory of user-generated appropriateness was presented.

While the emergent theory and the detailed results presented and discussed in this chapter are giving some first answers to the research questions, the next chapter will conclude and summarise this dissertation by discussing some final thoughts on the meaning of both, the model of user-oriented appropriateness and the research project in its entirety.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

In the current research project grounded theory methodology was used to explore how Facebook users want to be addressed by PR communication within the social network. The resulting outcome is the theoretical model of user-oriented appropriateness presented and discussed in the last chapter.

While in this last chapter the components of the model have been discussed in detail and – whenever possible – compared to findings of previous studies and to previous knowledge presented within the literature review, this summarising chapter will focus on presenting and discussing the meaning of this research project in its entirety.

The chapter starts with concluding thoughts and a final discussion on both, the developed theory of user-oriented appropriateness itself and the whole research project of this dissertation in general. In regard to the research questions that were guiding this dissertation, it will summarise the findings briefly to answer these questions and illuminate the dissertations contribution to knowledge.

After that, limitations of these findings and the research process itself will be discussed before recommendations for further research will be presented.

At the end of this chapter, the thesis will be summarised and concluded by naming the project implications for those who are involved in the practical side, those PR officers who are working in the field of (digital) public relations.

5.2. Concluding Thoughts & Discussion

While it was the aim of this dissertation study to explore how Facebook users want to be addressed by public relations communication within the social network, two research areas that have not been combined in this way before have now been illuminated in the light of each other: theories of computer-mediated communication and online linguistics on the one hand and the development of digital public relations in a social media environment on the other.

As discussed in the introduction and the literature review, it is argued that public relations is fundamentally concerned with the process of communication and that it is the most important skill of every PR officer to communicate well with a certain target group (Lipschultz, 2015; Fawkes, 2012; Mast, 2008). But since the rise of the Internet and especially since SNS such as Facebook have gained enormous popularity, the practice of public relations has changed. After decades of focusing on media relations and gatekeepers, PR officers are now using social media tools to communicate directly with the customers (Lipschultz, 2015; Steinke, 2015; Heather, 2012; Wright & Hinson, 2009). However, this direct communication via social media tools and the Internet is argued to be different. While scholars have done research on the impact of the Internet on both human communicative behaviour and the language used within an online world (Crystal, 2011; Baron, 2010; Baym, 2010; Thurlow et al., 2004), little empirical emphasis was put on combining the development of digital communication with the one of digital public relations.

Therefore, it was the overall aim of this dissertation to close this gap by putting the emphasis on the users and their language expectations within the PR-driven social media environment of Facebook. It was the objective to develop a theoretical understanding of what characteristics affect the user's interpretation and judgement whether a PR professional has used the right language and phraseology on the SNS by answering the two following research questions that guided this dissertation study:

RQ1: How do users of Facebook who engage with PR communications want to be 'spoken to' within the SNS?

RQ2: What affects the interpretation and understanding of the users while interpreting the text of a PR-driven post on Facebook?

As the result of this process, the theory of user-oriented appropriateness presented and discussed above, was developed to illustrate the process of appropriate PR communication within Facebook in the eyes of its users. Following, this theoretical model that centres around the phenomenon of appropriateness is the answer of both of the aforementioned research questions. However, while it might be easy to use the word appropriateness as the general answer to both of these questions, the truth is much more complicated.

As Baym (2010), Crystal (2011) and Thurlow et al. (2012) argue in relation to the general usage of online language by saying that there is no general, standardised digital language, a similar result was found in this study: There is no standardised tone, style and phraseology – no general appropriateness – that should be used by PR professionals. Following, the main and overall finding of this research is that there is no simple and easy answer to the research questions asked above but that the process of user-oriented appropriateness itself is manifold and complex. Results show that it all depends on the user's feeling of an appropriate usage of language and phraseology when deciding if he or she feels addressed or not. And it is the user who decides whether an emoticon, for example, was used the right way. As a consequence, it is the job of the PR professional at the other end of the channel to focus on the Facebook users appropriateness.

To make this process as easy as possible, to help focus on this user-oriented appropriateness and to illuminate what characteristics and conditions affect the user's interpretation and judgement of whether a PR professional has used an appropriate language and phraseology, the theoretical model of user-oriented appropriateness was developed and introduced. It reminds the PR professional that users want organisations to speak in a tone that they define as appropriate, discusses what this appropriateness is for the users and why this appropriateness is necessary in a fast-moving online environment where the users are used to communicating between friends. While some parts of this new model and the process of user-oriented appropriateness agree with results of previous research on PR, CMC and online language (e.g. Evans, Twomey & Talan, 2010; Fawkes, 2012), for example by explaining that users don't want a language that is too corporate and that they are aware that the interpretation of text-based online communication is generally seen as complicated, new findings show that appropriateness comes with individual relevance, expectations, simplification and that it means that the text used in an organisational post has to fit into the users private communicative world of Facebook – while bearing in mind that it is a particular organisation and not their best friends who are communicating with the users.

The model of user-oriented appropriateness was first and foremost developed in this research to create a theoretical understanding and illuminate the process of characteristics affecting the user's interpretation and judgement on whether a PR professional has used the right language and phraseology on Facebook. However, alongside those working in the digital public relations field, the findings of the research have relevance for those who study the general digital impact on our language. First, this research underlines the general need for an online language that fits into both the medium itself and the user's online world. Specifically,

(1) Facebook communication is clearly more complicated compared to other forms of communication (see 2.4.) and that needs some experience in terms of interpretation.

(2) Utilisation of phraseology and language that is closer to users' everyday speech – simple and limited in length – and that comes with an acceptance of emoticons that are enriching the communicative process goes in line with what has been found by scholarly work on the general usage of CMC and online language. (e.g. Crystal, 2011; Baym, 2010; Baron, 2008; Thurlow et al., 2004; Walther, 1992).

The research also provides additional insights that could be relevant for other areas of online communication. As a first example, there is appropriateness itself. This refers to the point that the language used to communicate something should be chosen well and with a clear focus on the user at the other side of the channel, a user who is likely to be in a hurry and not as focused as he or she would be in a face-to-face conversation. Secondly – and as a result of this appropriateness – there is the differentiation by topic, reason, interest and sympathy; an aspect that underlines that there is no general online language that is always appropriate but that it is all about the situation and the receiver. Thirdly, appropriateness and differentiation lead to the finding that some means, for example emoticons and abbreviations, are not accepted generally online. While, for example, some emoticons were found to be accepted in PR-driven posts, others were seen as inappropriate for organisational communication. This raises the question of whether their usage differs in other forms of online communication.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

The current study has several strengths. First, the grounded theory methodology with its detailed, step-by-step analysis ensured that the outcome of the research process is really grounded. Secondly, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with male and female participants of different ages (from 21 to 67) that had different levels of experience in the usage of CMC and Facebook ensured rich data. In addition, these participants scrolled through and discussed a large number of PR posts from a wide variety of organisations – organisations they cared about and those they did not like, organisations of different sizes and with a focus on different products and sectors.

However, there are also several limitations that need to be addressed. The first limitation concerns the interpretative nature of this study and the results. While interpretivism was chosen because of its strength in understanding people's thoughts and motives (Thomas, 2013; Oates, 2006), this understanding comes with the limitation that the results are based on the researcher's individual understanding and interpretation of the data. Thus, another researcher might have interpreted the findings differently and come to different results.

Another limitation is concerning the sample size of this study. Although the concept of theoretical saturation was used and the number of 15 interviewees is seen as appropriate in a grounded theory study, 15 users of Facebook are still a very small number compared to the millions of users the social network has. As a result, this small sample decreases generalisation, while a larger sample might result in findings that are more generalisable.

Also, the usage of language is a living, self-changing process (Reichertz, 2009) – both offline and online. As users have learned how to communicate within Facebook and how to use the given tools and technical features to ensure that they interpret each other correctly, this development might go on and create new standards of how to communicate appropriately on the Internet. In addition, new social networks, techniques and devices might arise and become popular, too, which could also affect how we communicate with each other – and that could lead to another change in public relations, too. Following this likely development, the findings may only be of importance for a certain amount of time.

5.4. Recommendations for Further Research

This research study is significant because it is a first attempt at combining the research areas of computer-mediated communication and online linguistics and the one of digital public relations to explore how users of Facebook want to be addressed by public relations within the SNS. However, since it was a first attempt there are several recommendations for further research projects:

- First, the findings of this dissertation could be used as the basis of a quantitative research study that tests the results on a much larger sample.
- As banks, insurance companies and energy providers, for example, were differentiated in this study, it might also be worth focusing on different commercial sectors and exploring the differences in users' expectations between these different sectors.
- Thirdly, it might be interesting to compare the findings and results of this study with the ones of similar projects that focused on different languages and cultures. As this research project was done in Germany and focused on the usage and interpretation of organisational postings that were written in German, it might also be interesting to see if different cultures see certain aspects differently, for example if the border between closeness and distance would be same in

different countries or if certain cultures would agree, disagree or even enlarge the acceptance of emoticons and smileys found in this project. Furthermore it would be interesting to see what differences and/or similarities could be found between different languages.

- Lastly, as the rapid development of online technology and the further usage of social networking sites are both likely to change our use of language in the future, it might also be interesting to repeat the study in a few years' time to explore how users then want to be addressed by PR and to compare the possible new findings with the results of this dissertation study.

5.5. Final Conclusion and Project Implications

This study has examined how users of Facebook want to be addressed by PR communication within the social network. Through the usage of grounded theory methodology, the theory of user-oriented appropriateness was created and introduced to provide a theoretical understanding of what affects the user's interpretation of PR posts within Facebook and of what makes this organisational communication appropriate in the eyes of the user. Thus, appropriateness was identified as the core of what makes the user feel addressed by public relations within the Facebook social networking site.

Although several conditions influence the users' judgement of whether or not the text used in a PR post is seen as appropriate within the SNS, there are some general implications for those PR officers who are working in the field of digital public relations. First, PR officers should avoid the usage of language that is too formal and/or too corporate. Instead, they should adopt the private language, the private tone and style their target group is using within Facebook. However they should bear in mind that there is a border they should not cross – one that turns an appropriate PR post into one that is too close and too private. In addition, they should sharpen their messages and focus on what is really important to say, avoiding everything that is able to influence the user's interpretation in a negative way and that is seen as a source of interference in the course of interpretation. Facebook is used in many different situations, and in most of these situations the user is not totally focused on the social network or on a certain post on his or her timeline. Thus, PR officers should support users in the process of interpretation by simplifying the post by using short, easy, everyday language. Furthermore, they should carefully think about what means, for example emoticons, could be appropriate in this situation to underline the meaning of the text and support the fast interpretation.

By using a language and phraseology that the user sees as appropriate, one that makes him or her feel addressed within Facebook, the relationship between the organisation and the user will become stronger. The user will feel closer to the organisation – because of the appropriate relationship which has been articulated within the written text.

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Appendix A: **Interview Guide**

Interview Guide

Opening Ice-Breaker-Question

1. What would you say makes a good conversation for you?

Part 1: General talk about written communication within the SNS

2. Now let's focus on written online communication, please. Generally spoken, how do you feel about written communication within Facebook, for example? (How comfortable to you feel with this kind of communication?)

3. Is there anything that is helping you to make this written online communication easier?

4. How do you ensure yourself that your friends are getting your messages right?

5. As this research is focusing on PR communication: Would you say there are any differences in the way your friends are 'talking' to you and the way organisations should 'talk' to you within the social network?
   - If yes: What are they?

Part 2: Scrolling through organisational Facebook postings

6. Would you mind scrolling trough some PR postings of the companies you are already following here on Facebook?

7. First, please scroll through the postings, read them and share any of your thought about these postings with me. For example, what do you like, what don't you like?

8. *(Added in later interviews) After you have looked at postings of companies you know or care about, please let's look at some postings of their competitors or of organisations that you do not like to see whether or not your thoughts about their postings are any different.*

Part 2.1: Focus on what is needed to have a feeling of being addressed

9. How do you feel about the phraseology? Do you like the way the postings are written?

10. How would you say is the style and tone different from the one your friends are using here on Facebook? Or how should it differ in you opinion?

11. What is helping you to judge whether or not you like the way the organisation is speaking to you as a customer?

12. Generally spoken: How formal or informal would you say should organisations 'speak' to you within Facebook?

13. *(Added in later interviews) Are there any differences between the organisations you sympathise with and those you do not like or haven't heard about before?*

Part 2.2: Focus on RQ2 and what is affecting the process of interpretation

14. In the first part of this interview, you were (also) talking about things that are helping to ensure your own messages are interpreted right by you friends. If you are now looking at the organisational postings, is there anything that is helping you to interpret the messages (maybe: differently)?

15. Are there any means that affect your interpretation? Or that affect the meaning of the written words?

16. *(Added in later interviews) Precisely, how do you feel about the usage of... (1)... emoticons, (2)... hashtags, (3)... initials in organisational postings*

17. *(Added in later interviews) How would you say does the company behind the posting affect your interpretation and expectation of the written posting?*

18. What role do the chosen words and the language in general play?

Summary of what is important in organisation postings

19. After all, could you please summarize in your own words what's most important for you if PR officers create a posting for you on Facebook?

Final questions

20. Is there anything else not addressed in this interview that you think might relate to the topic and/or might be important for this research?

Appendix B: **Research Information Sheet**

University of Salford MANCHESTER

Do you feel spoken to?

Dear possible participant,

during the last decade, the Internet has more and more affected how we stay up to date. The media industry has discovered the powerful advantages of the social Internet and is using it besides traditional media. And since a few years, organisations progressively also use the Internet to communicate directly with their target group - with you. But: this online-communication is a little different. PR people that have grown up using traditional media, often struggle with this new, digital world and its unfamiliar language. You and more and more other users, on the other side, do not - and might expect a different form of communication to interpret PRís messages the right way.

Thus, I would like to know how you interpret the postings of your favourite campanies or products - in your favourite social network.

I would be very happy if you could help me find out how the iInternet with it‘s reduced communicational cues influenced your interpretation when it comes to PR communication - and if you feel spooken to.

All that I need is a little bit of your time to do an interview with you. Where ever you‘d like me to be. Just contact me via b.gust@salford.edu.uk.

Thank you very much!

Appendix C: **Consent Form**

University of Salford MANCHESTER

Research Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Dear possibly participant,

my name is Benjamin Gust and I am a researching PhD-Student at the School of Music, Media and Performance at the University of Salford, United Kingdom. (For more information about my school or university please visit www.smmp.salford.ac.uk)

This information sheet provides you with all the information you need to decide if you would or would not like to help me with my research - in beeing one of my interviewees.

So, what is my research about?
In fact, my research focuses totally on you and your interpretation. I would like to know how you in person interpret text based public relations communication practices in social media environments. Or in other words: I am interessted in your thoughts about posts that different companies made on a Facebook fanpage, for example.

Why does this topic matter - and why does your opinion matter?
During the last decade, the Internet has more and more affected how we stay up to date. The media industry has discovered the powerful advantages of the social Internet and is using it besides traditional media. And since a few years, organisations progressively also use the Internet to communicate directly with their target group - with you. But: this online-communication is a little different. PR people that have grown up using traditional media, often struggle with this new, digital world and its unfamiliar techniques and language. You and more and more other users, on the other side, do not – and might expect a different form of PR communication within the social network.

You could help me find out how the internet with it‘s reduced communicational cues influenced your interpretation when it comes to PR communication - and if you feel spooken to.

What exactly would I like to know?
In order to undestand how you interpret PR‘s communication practices in social media envorinments I am interessted in findings such as the following ones:

- Do you, who engages with PR communications via social media, like/dislike the way you are ‘spoken’ to? How do you feel about the words and phraseology used within the post?
- What is affecting you interpretation of a written (PR) post?
- Formal or informal – how should organisations ‘speak’ to you as their target group?
- Do PR professionals use language and words that you, as the user, expected them to use?

1/2

University of Salford MANCHESTER

What do you have to do/How will I gain my data?
The only thing I am asking you for is to give me an hour of your time and and have a chat/an interview about you and your thoughts while we look at different postings of different companies in one of your favorite social network.

What‘s happening with your information?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, except as required by law. In any publications resulting from this research, text based findings will be presented in such a way that you can not be identified unless you expressly agree otherwise. If you choose to allow the use of photographic and video evidence, this will not carry your name, however you will be informed that, of course, you may well be indentifiable in it.

Do you have the right to withdrawl after you gave me an interview?
Yes. If you feel unconfortable after you have given me the interview, you have the right to withdrawl - at any given time before I hand in my dissertation. Just contact me via b.gust@edu.salford.ac.uk

Consent
You will be given a copy of this form. You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the information overleaf, you have decided to take part in the study (However you can withdraw consent at anytime).

Name of Research Informant/Interviewee	Signature of Research Informant/Interviewee
Date	Signature of Researcher (Benjamin Gust)

Revocation Of Consent

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the research described above.

Name of Research Informant/Interviewee

Date	Signature of Research Informant/Interviewee

If you would like do withdrawl, please forward this section, either in hard copy or via email, to: Benjamin Gust, c/o Prof. Ben Light, School of Media, Music and Performance, Maxwell Building, University of Salford, Salford, M3 6EN, UK – or email me via **benjamin.gust@gmail.com**

2/2

Appendix D: **List of Interviewees**

Name	Age	Gender	Length	Sampling Criteria (recommended by)
Emma	22	female	1:10 h (70 min.)	getting started: Facebook user and fan of multiple brands
Peter	32	male	0:41 h (41 min.)	getting started: Facebook 'heavy user', fan of multiple brands
Finja	26	female	0:50 h (50 min.)	getting started: Facebook user and fan of multiple brands
Leon	27	male	1:13 h (73 min.)	passive Facebook user (Peter)
Romy	35	female	0:56 h (56 min.)	Facebook "heavy user"; huge fan of smileys (Emma)
Friederike	64	female	1:11 h (71 min.)	older, female Facebook user; less experienced (Finja)
Verena	30	female	0:48 h (49 min.)	female 24/7 Facebook user (Romy)
Steffi	35	female	1:27 h (87 min.)	female Facebook user, isn't following a lot of brands (Leon)
Alex	22	male	1:06 h (66 min.)	younger, male 24/7 Facebook user (Verena)
Manuela	45	female	1:17 h (77 min.)	less experienced, older user who loves good language (Steffi)
Felix	24	male	1:08 h (68 min.)	follows a lot of 'serious' brands on Facebook (Alex)
Gandalf	30	male	0:52 h (52 min.)	opposite of Manuela, loves slang and fresh language (Manuela)
Malte	25	male	1:10 h (70 min.)	Facebook user who isn't following a lot of brands (Alex)
Iris	38	female	1:12 h (72 min.)	loves propper language; early CMC experience, (Gandalf)
Herbert	61	male	1:03 h (63 min.)	older, male Facebook user with CMC experience (Iris)

Appendix E: **List of Organisations**

3freunde
8x4 Deutschland
Alternate
Amazon.de
Amazon.de
Audi Deutschland
Avon
Barilla
BASF
BASF Karriere
Beck's
Ben & Jerry's
Bosch Heimwerken & Garten
Braun
buch.de
Canon Deutschland
Carglass Deutschland
chefkoch.de
Decatlon Deutschland
Deutsche Bahn Konzern
DEVK
Disney Deutschland
dm-drogerie markt Deutschland
Dove Men+Care
EDEKA
Ernsting's family
Fisher-Price
Fisherman's Friend
FlixBus
Förderverein Lavia Trauerbegleitung e.V.
Garnier Deutschland
GEPA - The Fair Trade Company
Germanwings
Gillette Deutschland
H&M
HARIBO Deutschland
Hornbach Baumarkt
Hülsta
IKEA Deutschland
Jack Daniel's Deutschland
Jever Fun
kinder Riegel
Leibnitz
Lidl
LIDL
LR Health & Beauty Systems Germany
Lufthansa
Mayersche Buchhandlung
McDonald's Deutschland
Media Markt Deutschland
Miele Österreich
Milka
Mirácoli
Nutella
nutella Deutschland
Parfümerie Douglas Deutschland
PartyLite Deutschland
PayPal
Penaten
Postbank
ProSieben
Ritter Sport Deutschland
Rossmann
Samsung Deutschland
Sanella
sheego
Siemens Home Deutschland
Sparkasse
Sparkasse Münsterland Ost
STADA Arzneimittel AG
SuperBioMarkt AG
Tassimo Deutschland Österreich
Schweiz
Tchibo
TeeGschwendner
Teekanne
teezeit.de
Thalia Buchhandlung - Thalia.de
The Daily Dose
toom Baumarkt
Tupperware Deutschland
Vapiano
Vodafone Deutschland
Wella Professionals
Weltbild Deutschland