

**Master thesis title: “The role of social media in communication. Exploration of the connection between deployed channels, the interaction with the Facebook community and the importance of social media in corporate communications.”**

**Abstract**

Nowadays companies are more than ever facing the challenge of using the variety of available communication channels as effectively and efficiently as possible – especially when looking at social media. Even though research is increasingly focusing on social media and its potential to contribute to corporate communications, the connection between corporate activities in social media and their perceived relevance from a corporate viewpoint has not been sufficiently explored so far. The topic of social media has reached the Austrian insurance companies – to analyse this trend and its impact on the use, interactivity and importance of social media in corporate communications the present thesis investigates the connection between deployed social media channels, the interaction with the Facebook community and the importance of social media in corporate communications in Austrian insurance companies.

Integrated communication, corporate flexibility requirements, network theory and dialogic models of communication, as well as evaluation methods and feedback implementation are discussed. A quantitative research design is employed to analyse twelve different social media channels as a first step, assessing the Facebook activities and community in more detail, it being the mostly used platform. Then, in a second step, an online questionnaire is sent out to the person responsible for social media in the respective company to get insights into the corporate view. The full survey of all insurances operating in Austria is executed based on the data of the Austrian insurance association (VVO).

Findings suggest that a higher level of corporate experience with social media channels strengthens the importance of social media within corporate communications, but responsibilities are equally clear, independent of the level of experience. Moreover, results indicate that evaluation and reporting is important, regardless of the social media team size and that customer orientation is of high relevance, independent of the usage intensity of social media. However, further outcomes show that image-heavy content leads to significantly higher interactivity within the Facebook community and generally, smaller communities are more interactive on Facebook than larger ones. In the usage of social media, no differences could be found regarding the relevant department. Further research would be needed to assess whether these findings also apply to companies from different sectors. Moreover, especially social media channels relevant for HR could be examined in more depth to get information on their contribution to employer branding procedures and recruitment communication.