

Implementation of social media in business strategies in the retail sector in The Netherlands



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Executive Summary

This report contains: Implementation of social media in business strategies in the retail sector in The Netherlands. The central question is: In what ways has the implementation in 2016 of a new communication strategy with a focus on social media influenced the market share of supermarket PLUS? This report was written by a student at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. The following theoretical frameworks were used for this research:

The theory of dialogic communication. (Kent and Taylor, 1998) This theory is a useful framework for understanding how organizations build and maintain their online social relationships. With the increasing technology and developments, there have been more opportunities than ever before in the field of social media to spread marketing messages, to reach the target group. The usage of social media will only increase in the future.

About the trends and developments in the field of social media usage in The Netherlands, Statista stated that the top five of social media in The Netherlands are Whatsapp, Youtube, LinkedIn, and Instagram. (Statista, 2018)

Apart from these social media channels, all supermarkets mentioned in this paper have their own websites and commercials on television. PLUS makes use of Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram. One of the conclusions is that the most appropriate type of social media used by PLUS supermarkets in The Netherlands really depends on which target groups they want to reach. It is important to be active online, because in general Dutch people are too. Approximately 73 per cent of Dutch people are active on a daily basis, compared with 68 per cent in 2016. (Pieters, J., 2018). Facebook is the most suitable social media channel for reaching an older generation. According to MarketingFacts, 77 per cent of the Facebook users are between the ages of 40 and 64 (2017). Instagram is suitable for a younger target group. On Instagram, 73 per cent of the users are between the ages of 15 to 19 years. (Statista, 2018) Even if The Netherlands is dealing with an aging population, it is nevertheless at the top in the field of digitalization.

It can also be concluded that the usage of customer intimacy and social media in business strategies are important as well. These strategies improve the shopping experience and thereby the supermarket can distinguish itself as much as possible from the competitors. Another conclusion that can be drawn is market shares of supermarkets have changed. In 2016, PLUS switched to a strategy of purpose marketing. Purpose marketing recognizes the importance of social media use by customers. Since then, PLUS has focused on communicating its social entrepreneurship policy by social media and this, and other online activities, such as online shopping, has led to growth of a market share of 0,21 per cent.

This research will contribute to the confirmation that social media will play an increasingly important role and it could have an advisory role in decision making and improvement of the usage of social media in the PLUS supermarkets.

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Preface

You are about to read the final dissertation on the subject implementation of social media in business strategies in the retail sector in The Netherlands. The central research question is: In what ways has the implementation in 2016 of a new communication strategy with a focus on social media influenced the market share of supermarket PLUS?

This report is written by a student at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. The reason I chose to undertake this research is that the developments in the field of mobile marketing and social media have changed considerably since the arrival of the internet. There are many possible opportunities available, which will be discussed in the third sub-question of this research, and these can also all be applied for commercial goals. Supermarket PLUS responds positive to this trend by creating social media accounts, which will be explained in third sub-question as well. This report investigates which way it is most appropriate, as in profitable, efficient and has the most engagement, for the supermarket PLUS in The Netherlands.

My interest in mobile marketing - especially via social media - has grown thanks to the Mobile Marketing course that I attended at the Fachhochschule in Bielefeld during my exchange from September 2017 till February 2018. I chose the supermarket PLUS as the focus of my research, because I worked there, amongst other as a service manager from July 2011 till August 2018. This gives me experience and contacts at the company, which I was able to put into use when writing this research. I will make a comparison between PLUS supermarkets and other Dutch supermarkets.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, mister Diojdescu, for the guidance and support during this process. I would like to thank my family and my friends as well for their support. A special mention to my aunt Linda Polman for her time and effort to proofread my dissertation. I could not have completed this research without their cooperation.

Amsterdam, January 7th, 2019.

Introduction

Today we live in a digital world and almost everything, from newspapers to online insurances, is being digitalized. The developments in the field of mobile marketing and social media have increased significantly. Social media have a big impact on our lives. Almost everyone on this planet is active online and uses social media. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp are the most well-known and most used social media platforms. Photos, videos, and messages are shared on these. According to Hubspot the statistics show that social media will grow even more rapidly in the future. (Hubspot, 2018) According to Statista, the number of users worldwide will increase from 2,46 billion in 2017 to 2,62 billion in 2018, to 2,77 billion in 2019, up to 3,02 billion in 2021. (Statista, 2018) It is interesting how social media can also be used for commercial purposes, such as showing targeted advertising and/or promotions. Companies find creative ways to send their marketing messages via social media, including supermarket PLUS. PLUS has been active online for many years and shares its messages and/or promotions to keep their customers informed. Like other supermarkets, PLUS uses social media in efforts to increase its reach, its brand awareness, and its market share.

Because of the growing importance of social media in today's business as well as in the businesses of the future, I explore the question how the retail sector could use their digital tools to reach their target group. In the context of this research, the focus is on PLUS supermarkets. The central question is: In what ways has the implementation in 2016 of a new communication strategy with a focus on social media influenced the market share of supermarket PLUS? To find answers to the central question, the following sub-questions were made and researched:

Sub-question 1: What are social media and what types, trends, and developments can we distinguish?

Sub-question 2: What types of social media are used most by B2C retailers in The Netherlands and why?

Sub-question 3: What are the challenges and opportunities of using social media for B2C retailers in The Netherlands and why?

Sub-question 4: In what ways has the implementation in 2016 of a new communication strategy with a focus on social media influenced the market share of supermarket PLUS?

Methodology

This report contains qualitative research based on desk research to get an answer to the central question: In what ways has the implementation in 2016 of a new communication strategy with a focus on social media influenced the market share of supermarket PLUS? Research must be repeatable with the same results. In this research, a choice was made to use academic articles from Google Scholar, which are extensively mentioned in the list of References, because it provides full texts and data in the field that were of interests for this research. The first chapter is intended to introduce the subject and further concepts. It helped in a better understanding the subject and in explaining definitions. Google Scholar provided also relevant statistics. This was necessary to describe the current situation, the (pre-) history and the emergence of social media. The second chapter is about the usage of social media by supermarkets. The source Statista was used to obtain recent research, about the use of social media over the past years. These data were used to indicate trends and developments. Comparisons were made between definitions given of the concept social media and B2C as given in Cambridge Dictionary and Business Dictionary. Comparisons were made of the different social media accounts used by competing B2C retailers in The Netherlands, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter and website. The third chapter covers trends and development of social media. To get a general view, the situation in The Netherlands was researched. Several SWOT analyses on the usage of social media in The Netherlands were used and compared, because this model indicates the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, which can be used for predictions.

One of the SWOT analyses used, by Bart van de Casteel, SEA marketer, was useful in comparing similarities and/or differences. According to Bart van de Casteel, there are strengths and weaknesses, these are extensively explained by this researcher and they were very useful in this research of this paper. To obtain a focus on the internet usage of the Dutch population, an analysis by Robert van Eekhout, the founder of the website of-ons.nl, which keeps statistics and figures of Dutch internet usage, was used, because of the currentness of his facts and statistics.

In this research, the website Statista, a leading provider of market and consumer data, was consulted. This sources contains facts and statistics on the usage of social media, based on previous research from 2018, and therefore has the most recent figures, which can be used for comparisons.

Literature review

The following sub-questions were answered by using these sources:

Sub-question 1: What are social media and what types, trends and developments can we distinguish?

To answer this sub-question, the following sources are used: Cambridge Dictionary and Business Dictionary, to get an introduction to the topic and to get a clear view of the definitions of the term social media. Statista was used to get a better picture of the developments and future trends of social media. This way it is easier to predict or to sketch the situation for the usage of social media for PLUS supermarkets. The search terms and keywords of this part are: Social media, trends, future, definition and developments.

Sub-question 2: What types of social media are used most by B2C retailers in The Netherlands and why?

To answer this sub-question, the following sources were used: Websites of all relevant supermarkets, to get an overview of all social media platforms, the current situation and which is suitable for usage in the retail in The Netherlands. A comparison will be made between the supermarkets to point out the differences and/or similarities. Further, Cambridge Dictionary was used to get a definition of the concept: Competitive analysis. Statista was used for facts and statistics about the usage of social media in The Netherlands. Moreover, the current situation in The Netherlands was researched. The search terms and keywords of this part are: B2C, The Netherlands, social media, platforms, retail, competitors.

Sub-question 3: What are the challenges and opportunities of using social media for B2C retailers in The Netherlands and why?

To answer this sub-question, the following sources were used: Websites about the use of SWOT model, to analyse the challenges and opportunities for the usage of social media in B2C retailers in The Netherlands. An article written by Robert van Eekhout, the founder of the website ons.nl which keeps statistics and figures of Dutch internet usage, was consulted. Articles written by Arnout De Vries and Bart van de Casteel about SWOT analysis of social media in retail were consulted. Bart van de Casteel detects a weakness for the users of social media. Social media are still at the beginning of the development phase and many possibilities still have to be discovered. It is still unknown what the possible added value or dangers for retailers can be. (Van de Casteel, 2011) Potential threats are miscommunication, chaos and having no control. Retailers must have a clear plan with visible results

that needs to be achieved with social media. Because such a plan is missing in many companies, they stop the use of social media. (Van de Casteel, 2011)

Due to a lack of time and the complexity of the subject, not all aspects of the SWOT of social media in The Netherlands can be examined, but the relevant ones will be highlighted. The search terms and keywords of this part are: SWOT, challenges, risks, opportunities, social media, B2C retailers, The Netherlands.

Sub-question 4: In what ways has the implementation in 2016 of a new communication strategy with a focus on social media influenced the market share of supermarket PLUS?

To answer this sub-question, the following sources were used: The marketing model of Treacy and Wiersema, to help formulate the strategy of a company. Furthermore, publications of R2H, a company that has an advisory role for companies with a social media strategies were consulted. The theories of Evan LePage and Christina Newberry from the website Hootsuite were used for an alternative view and approach of a social media marketing strategy. The following titles in trade literature were used: Marketing Tribune, Adformatie, Adweek, and Anotherconcept.nl. Statistics were used, gathered by: Buzzcapture, MarketingFacts, and Distrifood. Finally, PLUS' own MVO Annual Report of Social Entrepreneurship (2017) was consulted.

The search terms and keywords of this part are: Online strategy, social media, PLUS, social media marketing strategy.

Furthermore, in general, the following sources for my research paper were used: Academic articles about social media, LexisNexis, website PLUS.nl, and Google Scholar. Thanks to my longtime working experience in the supermarket PLUS (field research), more information was gathered that was needed to complete my research.

More general keywords and search terms were used, such as: Social media, mobile marketing, digital business, digital trends, digital marketing, advertising, mobile applications, developments and digitalization, supermarket PLUS.

The stakeholders in this research are: The Hague University of Applied Sciences and PLUS supermarkets.

Theoretical framework

With the increasing technology and developments, there have been more opportunities than before in the field of social media to spread marketing messages and to reach the target group. However, this is still in development and is in an upcoming phase, and the problem is to which extent the implementation of a new communication strategy in 2016 with a focus on social media influenced the market share of supermarket PLUS. The following sub-questions were formulated:

Sub-question 1: What are social media and what types, trends and developments can we distinguish?

Sub-question 2: What types of social media are used most by B2C retailers in The Netherlands and why?

Sub-question 3: What are the challenges and opportunities of using social media for B2C retailers in Netherlands and why?

Sub-question 4: In what ways influenced the implementation of a new communication strategy in 2016 with a focus on social media the market share of supermarket PLUS?

The most important definitions and relevant theories of this research will be compared and explained. The following definitions will be used during this research:

B2C: 'Describing or involving the sale of goods or services directly to customers for their own use rather than to business.' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018)

Digitalization: 'Integration of digital technologies into everyday life by the digitization of everything that can be digitized.' (Business Dictionary, 2018)

Retailer: 'A business or person that sells goods to the consumer, as opposed to a wholesaler or supplier, who normally sell their goods to another business.' (Business Dictionary, 2018)

Retailer: 'A person, shop, or business that sells goods to the public.' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018)

Social media: 'Are applications and tools to share information among people. Social media contains blogging and forums which allows individuals to interact or to engage with each other.' (Business Dictionary, 2018)

Social media: 'consists of two parts: Social, communication and reaction between people and the media part; how it is communicated. This can be done via Internet, TV and Radio.' (Nations, D.)

The following theoretical frameworks are used for this research:

The Dialogic communication Theory. (Kent and Taylor, 1998)

This theory is a useful framework for understanding how organizations build and maintain their online social relationships. This is important for the use of social media. It is interesting to investigate whether this dated theory (1988) still applies to the current situation. In addition, this theory explains how to improve the interaction of social media based on social relationships, how increase the frequency of communication, how improve user satisfaction through greater transparency and participation, and strengthen the trust between organizations and their stakeholders. The Dialogic communication Theory of Kent and Taylor fits well with the research question and will be used during the research.

Social Media Integration Model

This model is a marketing strategy that allows to contribute according to Ruben Quinones, vice president of client strategy at Path Interactive and deputy at the NYU School of Professional Studies. This model is different from other social media models and traditional models and shows the organic nature of social media. This model focuses on viral communication on social media platforms.

The theory of dialogic communication (Kent and Taylor 1998) and the Social Media Integration Model are most applicable and will therefore be used in this study. Both have a strong link to the usage of social media and both focus on the relationship between the company and the customers. There is a clear correlation between the concepts B2C, digitalization, retailer and social media. Retailers fall under the concept of B2C and the digitalization process goes along with social media. The theory of dialogic communication deals with the relation between the concepts retailer and social media. The similarities between my research and previously published studies are that my research is partly based on previous studies that have been found useful and that this is also a fairly recent study. The differences between this research and previously published studies are that this research is now focused on a specific retailer, supermarket PLUS and the time period in which the research took place. This research will contribute to the confirmation that social media will play an increasingly important role and it could have an advisory role in decision making and improvement of the usage of social media in the PLUS supermarkets.

Results

Sub-question 1: What are social media and what types, trends and developments can we distinguish?

Social media is a broad concept. To get a clear picture of the concept, the definition of 'social media' should be determined first. Therefore, the first sub-question is: What are social media and what types, trends and developments can we distinguish? The term social media consists of two parts: Social, as in: Communication and reaction between people, and media, as in: Means of communication. Possible means are Internet, TV and Radio. (Nations, D.)

There are various definitions of social media. For instance it is defined as applications and tools to share information among people. (Business Dictionary, 2018) Another definition is: 'Websites and programs to communicate and share information via computers and mobile phones.' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018) Social media include blogging as well as forums which allow individuals to interact or to engage with each other. (Business Dictionary, 2018) Different platforms can serve the same goal: Sharing information through photos, videos, and messages, as is the case with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, Youtube, Skype, LinkedIn and Snapchat. A common feature on all social media are user accounts or profile pages and news feeds. All of them require an user account or profile pages. These are personalized accounts, where login is required to share information. Often email details are requested for creating these accounts. This reduces the anonymity on the internet. (Lifewire, 2018) Furthermore, all social media have news feeds. These are messages or information of other users which users can read. (Lifewire, 2018)

A good example of this is Facebook. Messages by and for people are posted on Facebook are liked or shared by others. Furthermore, all platforms are personalized. This can be achieved by the users changing their settings. This way the user can decide who gets to see what. (Lifewire, 2018) In addition, there are notifications, which ensure that the user is informed of updates and new messages. Users can switch this feature on or off. Finally, there are Like buttons and comment sections. These allow users to interact on social media and leave their thoughts/ feedback behind. According to the statistics of Statista it is generally foreseen that the usage will only increase. According to Statista the number of users will increase from 2.62 billion in 2018 to 3.02 billion users in 2021. (Statista, 2018) Statista predicts that social networks will have a large increase of user accounts and a strong engagement metrics. Facebook has one billion active users monthly and more than 2.2 billion users worldwide and therefore, is a good example. After Facebook, Pinterest was the fastest growing website until the emerging of Instagram and Tumblr. (Statista, 2018) Not only are the number of user accounts increasing, but so is the engagement between people and companies

on/via social media as well. This happens in the form of mobile marketing or social/online advertising.

Statista claims that the average internet user spends 135 minutes per day on social media and this leads to opportunities for marketers to reach their customers and spread their marketing messages and product awareness across the world. (Statista, 2018)

Another development is that mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, are more frequently used for social networking. Those mobile devices are provided with constant presence of mobile-first or mobile-only platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and this leads to companies having to increase the quality of their online platforms to improve the satisfaction of customers' online needs and experiences. (Statista, 2018) When we specifically look at the trends and developments in the field of social media usage in The Netherlands, Statista claims that Whatsapp is the most widely used social media platform with 11,5 million users of which 8,6 million daily users. (Statista, 2018) The top five of social media in The Netherlands, according to Statista, are Whatsapp with 11,5 million users in total of which 8,5 million users on daily basis, Facebook with 10,8 million users in total of which 7,6 million users on daily basis, Youtube with 8 million users in total of which 2,2 million users on daily basis, LinkedIn with 4,4 million users in total of which 0,5 million users on daily basis, and Instagram with 4,1 million users in total of which 2,1 million users on daily basis). (Statista, 2018)

Much has changed with the arrival of social media. Social Media Marketing (SMM), Social Media Optimization (SMO), Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and analytics play an important role in company strategies.

Social Media Marketing is advertising through social media. Social Media Optimization is a digital strategy for the increased awareness of products and services. Search Engine Optimization is used to achieve a high-ranking position in the search result pages of any search engine.

Social Media Marketing is used to advertise products and raise awareness of the company via the social networks. (Rouse, M., N.d.) A good example of this is mobile marketing, advertising via mobile devices. By sending a targeted advertisement, the message is more likely to be appreciated and shared. This is also covered by social Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM). CRM creates a venue for communication, marketing, and networking for customers. Because social media make it easy for customers to communicate by sharing their experiences, the company can respond quickly and maintain, regain or rebuild customer confidence. (Rouse, M., N.d.)

Social Media Optimization is a strategy used to attract new visitors to a website. (Rouse, M., N.d.) Optimization can be done by placing links and sharing buttons, or by promoting activity through social media via status updates, tweets, or blog posts. (Rouse, M., N.d.) In this age, data and analytics are important for companies. Through social media analytics, the gathering of data from blogs and social media websites, and the analyses of data, businesses make decisions. (Rouse, M., N.d.)

There are special consultancy companies that are active in this field. These businesses help their clients with advice based on data and market research. They investigate how far the message has come and which channel is most effective. The arrival of social media made spreading of information easier, but it has also led to changes of another kind. A closer look at this is relevant to the central question of this research, because these days, there are more possibilities than ever before that can be used when implementing social media in the business strategy. Companies can experience progress, as well as limitations. One example is the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). A law that introduced in the European Union as recent as May 25th, 2018. (European Commission, 2017) GDPR replaced the old e-privacy directive from 2009, which only applied to traditional telecom companies. The new law includes more companies, such as Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, Skype, Gmail and iMessage. The new legislation also ensures that all consumers and businesses throughout the EU are equally well protected by protecting the content and metadata of communication. (European Commission, 2017) Examples of metadata are place and time of a message.

There is also a cookie determination in the GDPR. As a result, the consumer has to accept cookies on a website more often or again. This can be adjusted by the users by changing their settings. Often a website does not have to ask permission for cookies for everything. For example, a website may keep track of the number of visitors. It also prevents spam because it bans all electronic messages where no permission has been given or has been requested. (European Commission, 2017) According to Cambridge Dictionary, spam is unwanted email, usually advertisements. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018) Another description could be: Sending People Annoying Messages.

Finally, the new law provides for stricter data protection supervision, carried out by the national authorities. (European Commission, 2017) This law must, in addition to other regulations, protect the privacy of the consumer better. (European Commission, 2017)

Yet privacy is a contemporary conflict. Often the user does not know what and how much information he/she shares and who has access to this type of data. Today we share a lot of data without even knowing. This is called Big Data. Marketers use these personal data for economic goals or personal promotions. Another development of social media is the distribution of fake news. The creation of fake news would have started in 1439 with the printing by Gutenberg. Due to the arrival of the printing, there was the possibility to publish news reports and spread them widely. There were sources of official publications, religious authorities and eyewitness accounts, but there was no journalistic ethics or objectivity. (LexisNexis, 2017, p.3) Fake news is of all times, but President Trump of the United States had introduced this concept during his elections campaign and stuck with it. (LexisNexis, 2017, p.3) In July 2018, President Trump spoke for the veterans of foreign wars (VFW) in Kansas City. He pointed to the space in the room, where the media were allowed to sit, and said: 'Don't believe the crap you see from these people, the fake news. Just remember, what you're seeing

and what you're reading is not what's happening.' (President Donald Trump, 2018) (Kite, A., and Hancock, J., 2018)

With the possibilities and technology of today, fake news will increase not only thanks to President Trump, but also due to the emergence of the internet, the speed of spreading and the strong need for large online visitor numbers, impressions, clicks and shared social media posts. (LexisNexis, 2017, p. 4) This at the expense of truthful news reports. Due to the need for clicks and sharing, the news will be adjusted in such a way that people find it interesting to click, read and share, regardless if it is true or not.

Retailers also suffer from fake news. For them, fake news can come in the form of rumour spreading and fake promotions via Facebook, Whatsapp, SMS or via mail, as well as phishing actions. According to the website Hoax, a website that detects fake news, a new website, The Dutch Post, spread fake news about poisoned bread sold by supermarket Albert Heijn. The Dutch Post used fake research misusing the name of the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority. Fake studies by fake doctors were also cited. (Hoaxmelding, 2018)

Sub-question 2: What types of social media are most used by B2C retailers in The Netherlands and why?

This sub-question deals with the social media usage of B2C retailer, which includes supermarket PLUS and its competitors in The Netherlands, because the focus area of this research is on The Netherlands. This sub-question is relevant, because it gives an overview of which social media is most efficient for retailers in The Netherlands. All social media channels used by the different supermarkets will be researched and compared. For this sub-question, a competitive analysis will be used to determine the competitors of PLUS. The focus points are market penetration, profit and market share. Cambridge Dictionary gives the following definition of competitive analysis:

‘The process of comparing the strengths and weaknesses of your own business or product to those of other businesses, in order to make your business or product more competitive.’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018) The abbreviation of B2C stands for Business to Consumers, which refers to the chain between the stores and the end users. To give an official definition of B2C, Cambridge Dictionary stated as follows: ‘Describing or involving the sale of goods or services directly to customers for their own use rather than to business.’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018)

The usage of social media in supermarkets' strategies is evident, because according to the Dutch government, The Netherlands is the digital leader in Europe. The Netherlands achieved this through its digitization strategy. The 'Netherlands Digital' strategy reacts to the speed of digitization and its impact on society, which retailers can use for their online marketing. The Dutch government wants to make use of the social and economic opportunities of digitization. To quote from a document of the Dutch government: ‘One of the focus points for a strong and secure digital society and economy, is the focus on fair competition on online markets through accessible and transparent information, facilities and techniques. By applying online marketing by using social media, the digital infrastructure must be good and working.’ (Rijksoverheid, 2018) By investing in infrastructure for fixed and mobile communication, The Netherlands was number one in the European Union in 2017. Secretary Mona Keijzer (Department of Economic Affairs and Climate) says: The Netherlands Digital strategy will make our economy and society stronger. Thanks to our knowledge and infrastructure, the business sector has a good starting position to capitalize on opportunities.’ (Rijksoverheid, 2018) By using social media accounts, supermarkets have direct connections to the customers and vice versa. This allows customers to share positive and/or negative experiences and/or leave feedback for others. Any complaints can be handled quickly.

Supermarkets use social media channels by posting and sharing local promotions, competitions and videos, as well as recipes and cooking tips. As a business, it is important to use the most suitable social media channel for the desired target group. The most important target group of the

supermarkets are on average the target groups are between the ages of 20 to 65 years. They are the biggest grocery shoppers.

According to the statistics of Statista, 73 per cent of Dutch people are active on a daily basis, compared with 68 per cent in 2016. (Pieters, J., 2018). There is an increase in social media use among the elderly, according to the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2017). In 2017, 64 per cent of the ages group 65- to 75-year-olds were active on social media in the three months before the research. In 2012 this number was 24 per cent. In the group of 75 years and older in 2017, online usage increased to 35 per cent in 2017. (CBS, 2017) In the age group between 65 to 75 years, 61 per cent and of the over-75s, 33 per cent used a mobile phone or a smartphone in 2017. The Socialconcept website confirms these numbers on the basis of their own research and plausible predictions. (Socialconcept, 2017)

As stated previously, according to the website Statista, Facebook is the second most used social media channel after Whatsapp in The Netherlands with 10,8 million users, of which 7,6 million daily in 2018. (Statista, 2018) Facebook is, according to MarketingFacts, the most used social media channel of the target groups between the ages of 20-39 and 40-64 in 2017, with respectively 89 per cent and 77 per cent. (MarketingFacts, 2017)

However, young people are more likely to use Instagram. On Instagram, the numbers are 73 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 to 19 years, while 46 per cent between the ages of 20 to 39 years, 22 per cent are between the ages of 40 to 64 years, 9 per cent are between the ages of 65 to 79 years, and 6 per cent are between 80 and older. (Statista, 2018) There is a shift and an increase from Facebook to Instagram.

According to Statista, the number of users worldwide will increase from 2,46 billion in 2017 to 2,62 billion in 2018, to 2.77 billion in 2019, up to 3,02 billion in 2021. (Statista, 2018). It is therefore clear that social media will play an even more important role in the future, also for retailers.

The main competitors of PLUS, according to Owler and to the aforementioned definition of Cambridge Dictionary, are Jumbo, Albert Heijn and Lidl, but other Dutch supermarkets, such as Dirk van den Broek, will be taken into account here as well. (Owler, n.d.) Supermarket Jumbo uses the following social media according to a statement on their website: Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, Youtube and LinkedIn. (Jumbo, n.d.) Supermarket Albert Heijn is active on Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter and Google+ . (Albert Heijn, n.d) Lidl, with remark that it is a German chain, but operates in The Netherlands as well, has the following social media accounts: Facebook, Youtube, Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Twitter. (Lidl, 2018) Supermarket Dirk van de Broek is online on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and Pinterest. Apart from these social media channels, all supermarkets mentioned in this research have their own websites and commercials on television. TV commercials spread amongst a big audience. There are other Dutch

supermarkets, but these are not included because of the aforementioned criteria or they were not relevant.

PLUS makes use of Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram. PLUS had 137,690 followers on Facebook, 7,594 followers on Instagram and on Youtube 2.748 subscribers on December 18th 2018. Although these numbers are variable, it can be determined that Facebook is the most used channel by customers of supermarket PLUS.

Sub-question 3: What are the challenges and opportunities of using social media for B2C retailers in The Netherlands and why?

This sub-question deals with the challenges and opportunities of using social media. The situation in The Netherlands is examined to see how and where supermarket PLUS can respond to which aspects and in what way social media can be used. In order to map out the challenges and opportunities, a SWOT analysis of The Netherlands in the field of technology is used, because challenges and opportunities are part of this research method. A SWOT analysis is a model that can be used to examine Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The official definition according to Business Dictionary is: 'Situation analysis in which internal strengths and weaknesses of an organization, and externalities and threats' are measured. (Business Dictionary, 2018)

The Dutch people are very active online. The internet behaviour in The Netherlands is also relevant for the research, because supermarket PLUS can respond to this by adjusting their marketing messages and strategies and thus they can better find and understand their customers. According to Robert van Eekhout, the founder of the website ons.nl which keeps statistics and figures of Dutch internet usage, there are 16.38 million internet users of the total Dutch population in January 2018. That is a penetration of 96 per cent. Almost 11 million Dutch people also use social media, of which 9.8 million Dutch people do this via their mobile. That is a penetration of 64 per cent. (Van Eekhout, 2018) 97 per cent have a mobile phone, of which 87 per cent own a smartphone and about 61 per cent of Dutch people have a tablet. The daily internet usage of a Dutch person is on average 4 hours and 50 minutes, of which on average 1 hour and 20 minutes are spent on social media. (Van Eekhout, 2018) 52 per cent of social media use is done via smartphone and 46 per cent via desktop.

It is necessary to include e-commerce, as an important factor in this research. The size of the e-commerce market is more than € 10 billion in 2017 and the average revenue per customer for consumer goods is almost € 1,200 per year. (Van Eekhout, 2018)

First, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of social media are looked at in general, after which these are applied to The Netherlands. According to Bart van de Casteel, the strengths of social media are that they are accessible to everyone. This makes it personal and direct contact. A weakness, according to this researcher, is that social media are still at the beginning of the development phase and that many possibilities still have to be discovered and what the possible added value for businesses can be. According to Van de Casteel, opportunities social media offer, are that you can reach large and new target groups, as well as the speed of social media. (Van de Casteel, 2011) Finally, potential threats are miscommunication, chaos and having no control. There must be a clear plan with visible results that needs to be achieved with social media. Because such a plan is missing in many companies, they stop the use of social media. (Van de Casteel, 2011) According to

Arnout de Vries, there are also other aspects important in a SWOT analysis of social media. According to De Vries, the strengths of social media are available always and everywhere and are therefore independent of place and time. (De Vries, 2013) But there are also similarities between De Vries and Van De Casteel. They agree that the strengths of social media are accessibility to everyone and its speed. De Vries and Van de Casteel also agree that social media lead to direct and personal contact and that they have a large reach. Furthermore, they are often transparent and information is easy to find. Further, social media are diverse due to the many different communication platforms. (De Vries, 2013)

The weaknesses of social media, according to De Vries, is the intensity, because the social aspect can bring social pressure, (too) much attention and stress. (De Vries, 2013) Rapid innovation can also be seen as a weakness, because the growing technological possibilities and transparency lead to new dangers. (De Vries, 2013) De Vries also believes there is an overload of information and communication. He claims that statistics show that exabytes are now being produced every week. (De Vries, 2013) Moreover, it has become difficult to erase digital tracks, remove undesirable content or protect your personal data. Even more weaknesses are miscommunication and unclear added value of social media for businesses. (De Vries, 2013) The opportunities of social media according to De Vries are the large reach because many people are active online. (De Vries, 2013) This has made the information and communication faster and more effective. Social media connect people (examples are crowdsourcing actions) and help against influencing, because the users can better inform themselves and incorrect or coloured information is corrected by others. (De Vries, 2013) Because social media contain social innovation and technological innovation, this leads to new opportunities for partnerships and business models for companies. (De Vries, 2013)

The last part of the SWOT analysis are the threats of social media. A similarity between De Vries and Van de Casteel is that miscommunication can be seen as a threat by the information overload, translations, short cuts, incomplete information and fast communication. De Vries claims that the digital gap is also a threat. The digital gap is the difference between generations growing up with and without technology innovation. De Vries says: 'This gap is getting smaller in The Netherlands, but is still strong worldwide.' (De Vries, 2013) Sociobesitas, being everywhere and always online, also poses a threat to the efficiency and health of people. Finally, the rapid changes and abuse are threats because they create uncertainties. Abuse of social media can infringe conditions of social media providers (such as 'scraping'), legislation (including privacy and copyright) or unwritten norms and values (including user profiling). This abuse can be about content, personal data or your social network. Laws and regulations (and jurisprudence) must minimize or counteract these kind of abuses, but it remains a (growing) threat. (De Vries, 2013)

Due to a lack of time and complexity, not all aspects of the SWOT of social media in The Netherlands can be examined, but the relevant ones will be highlighted. One strength of The Netherlands is that it is the digital leader in Europe. There is also a Dutch digitization strategy. This provides better digital skills, cyber security and an improvement of the infrastructure. (Rijksoverheid, 2018) There is also a widespread of confidence in digitalization in The Netherlands. The government shows that investments are being made in innovations and maintenance. A weakness is that according to a survey by Statista, 64 per cent of Dutch people have not done any online shopping in 2018. (Statista, 2018)

Furthermore, the most used platforms are Whatsapp, Facebook and Youtube in The Netherlands. This can be seen as a weakness, because retailers are therefore limited in their choices of popular social media channels.

An opportunity for The Netherlands is that retailers can easily share or send their messages via online channels because of the good infrastructure. This leads to a reception by a big audience.

A threat may be that the arrival of new technology will make it difficult for The Netherlands to guarantee privacy. Another threat for the retailers is the aging population in The Netherlands, which means that certain groups, such as the elderly, cannot participate in the digital world, and are therefore hard to reach.

Sub-question 4: In what ways has the implementation in 2016 of a new communication strategy with a focus on social media influenced the market share of supermarket PLUS?

There are many social media communication strategies in the marketing of retailers. The marketing Value Strategies of Treacy and Wiersema (1995) help to formulate the strategy of a company.

According to the Treacy and Wiersema model, three major Value Strategies can be identified:

Product Leadership, Operational Excellence and Customer Intimacy. (Muilwijk, E., N.d.) In Product Leadership the focus is on the product, with quality and innovation as leading aspect. Operational Excellence is about optimization of operational processes. Efficiency is the core concept here. The last strategy is Customer Intimacy. Here the focus is on the customer, with a long-term relationship and loyalty from the customers as a result. At supermarkets optimal customer service, customer experience, sufficient customer attention and listening to wishes and concerns are considered important. The discussion of social media strategies will often fall under Customer Intimacy.

(Muilwijk, E., N.d.)

R2H, a company that has an advisory role for companies with social media strategy, drew up six strategies to intensify the Customer Intimacy strategy as identified by Treacy and Wiersema. (R2H, N.d.)

Strategy number one: Creating a community page. This means that all information is not only intended for the company, but is also addressed to the followers. Examples include: Information about the industry, trends and developments. (R2H, N.d.)

Strategy number two is a 'Webcare strategy', creating a service page. This means that questions from customers are answered or information is given about products or services. (R2H, N.d.)

Strategy number three is a quality protection page. This means that customers can leave their feedback about what they think of certain products and give their ideas. This results in a lot of interaction with the customer. (R2H, N.d.)

Strategy number four is a branding page. Here the core values of the company are mentioned. (R2H, N.d.)

Strategy number five is a company information page. Here the customers find a lot of general information from and about the company. (R2H, N.d.)

The last strategy is a push page. On a push page, a company only places its offers and promotions. This is good for short term. (R2H, N.d.)

Evan LePage and Christina Newberry from the Hootsuite website, promote a different approach of a social media marketing strategy than R2H. Their approach consists of eight steps. (LePage, and Newberry, 2018)

Step 1 is setting S.M.A.R.T. goals. S.M.A.R.T stands for: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound. Here the objectives and goals are mentioned.

Step 2 is to learn more about your audience. By gathering more information, it is possible to send or post more targeted content. It is more likely that the consumers will also like, comment on, and share the content more.

Step 3 is to make a competitive analysis of the competition. It is important to investigate what they have already done, where possibilities lie and how this can serve as inspiration for the company.

Step 4 consists of evaluating the current situation. This can be done by the feedback from the customers.

Step 5 is to determine which network to use and why and how.

Step 6 is finding inspiration and differentiating from other social media channels. This step can be combined with step 3.

Step 7 is making a social media content calendar to plan when what is posted.

The final step is to test, evaluate and adjust the strategy, where needed, and it is recommended to repeat this step. (LePage, and Newberry, 2018)

PLUS makes use of Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram. PLUS, therefore, make use of the all three strategies, in particular Customer Intimacy of the Treacy and Wiersema model. Of the eight steps developed by Lepage and Newberry, PLUS implements almost all steps. This is shown in the new communication strategy, which PLUS uses at the moment.

Starting in 2016, PLUS radically changed its communications strategy (as described in Marketing Tribune (2016)). Social media are very much part of this renewal. The company hired a new communication bureau, JWT Amsterdam, to develop the adapted strategy.

Until then, PLUS had focussed on the 'enlargement of the distinguish ability of PLUS as a brand'.

From 2016 on, PLUS focussed on content. With 'Good food. That is what we love', PLUS communicated more clearly than before what exactly their focus is: 'Good food, for everyone, every day'. In Marketing Tribune, PLUS explained that it had noticed an important development in the past few years: On social media, people expressed to have more attention to what they ate. Customers had developed a preference for 'pure' food: Fresh, preferably grown in their own region and fitting with the current growing seasons. They, furthermore, wanted their meals not to be too complicated to make and not too expensive. (Marketing Tribune, 2016)

The new brand values were 'Pure, Personal and Price'. Pure stands for clarity about the origins of food: Is it biological, or Fairtrade? Is attention being paid to animal welfare and the environment? Personal stands for making pure food accessible: Everyone should be able to put pure food on the table. PLUS wants to achieve this via sharing recipes, for example. Price stands for the financial

accessibility of pure food. In its communication via social media PLUS underlines low prices. (Marketing Tribune, 2016)

Starting in 2016, PLUS made a switch to what is called 'purpose-marketing'. In an article in Adformatie, dated March 16th, 2018, the 'Platform for Marketing, Media, Communication and Creation', explained this relatively new concept in the marketing branche: 'In this digital era, brands and marketers seem to have lost control', it says. (Adformatie, 2018) This was previously confirmed by Van de Casteel, who identified miscommunication, chaos and having no control as potential threats of the digital era. (Van de Casteel, 2011) Adformatie goes on to explain that in the 20th century the marketer was in charge. It was the marketer who chose which media and channels to put in use. But with the rise of the internet and social media everything changed: 'Now, the customer is in charge.' The customer verifies and compares, uses Google, exchanges thoughts and experiences with other social media users, and reads and writes reviews.' (Adformatie, 2018)

The platform claims that especially the younger generation learned to unmask marketing claims as 'hot air', misleading, or as 'greenwashing', when a company claims to be environment friendly, but really is not. (Adformatie, 2018)

'Brands have to rethink what contribution they can make to the community. This is why many brands now focus on their social purpose.' (Adformatie, 2018)

In its Annual Report for Sustainable Entrepreneurship (MVO Jaarverslag, 2017), PLUS gives examples of how its social media communication policy aims at supporting consumers 'in making the consciously aware choices' when shopping for groceries: 'Many of our healthy products like fruits and vegetables receive our full attention the whole year. This way we aim to stimulate consumption of these healthy products. Furthermore, PLUS does *not* want to stimulate the choice for less healthy house brand products through children's marketing. In 2017, all 40 packaging of house brand products that were about children's marketing were redesigned. PLUS is the first supermarket in The Netherlands not using happy cartoon figures and childish lettering on less healthy PLUS products.' (MVO Jaarverslag, 2017) (PLUS, 2017) The new policy was widely published via the PLUS website and its social media channels.

PLUS shows itself to be quick and alert in reacting to incoming comments and messages via Twitter and Facebook. Not only messages and remarks that are addressed to PLUS itself are quickly responded to, but all messages carrying the name of PLUS supermarkets are intercepted. One comment from @Groenfonds said that '@plussupermarket opposite our office in Amersfoort is

generously sprayed with Roundup, without protection, where customers walk by and in the presence of children. This make us, at @Groenfonds, sad.'

Roundup is a herbicide not dangerous for human beings, but which contains toxic elements anyway.

PLUS was quick to respond and did not hesitate: 'Thank you for this signal. We will not use this product anymore and battle the weeds on our doorstep with a environment friendly product.'

PLUS scored several likes and retweets with this answer.

In 2018 PLUS was elected 'Most Responsible Supermarket in The Netherlands' for the fourth year in a row. 2015 was its first year. The election is based on the yearly Sustainability Research (Duurzaamheidsonderzoek) initiated by Food Magazine, and performed by GfK (Growth from Knowledge), a large businesses data collector based in Germany. Criteria are amongst others health, fair trade, climate and commitment to the local community. PLUS scored a total 7,53 out of 10 in 2018.

The GfK research is about the reputation of supermarkets in the field of sustainability. 5,000 consumers are questioned. PLUS scored highest of all in the categories 'fair trade' and 'limiting food waste'. In all other categories PLUS ended in the top three.

By 2018, PLUS had introduced a 'sugar calculator' for soda drinks, 95 per cent of all PLUS stores were now sponsoring a local sports club, and a majority of PLUS stores had become a partner of local schools by providing school fruits or tours in the stores.

In August 2018, the news platform Marketing Facts, which is connected to the Nederlands Instituut voor Marketing (NIMA), interviewed Esmee Blom, PLUS' communication manager: 'We are very much part of the Dutch community. We service all of The Netherlands in our stores, so we know what is going on in the community. Our challenge is to connect current ideas and events with our vision. That is how we can be relevant and have an impact.' (Mirck, J., 2018)

Earlier, PLUS had already chosen storytelling as the most suitable communication tool. PLUS wants to tell stories about where the food is from (fair trade and/or biological) and publishes online interviews with local farmers about their products. PLUS also shows films in which cooks who are known for their programmes on 24Kitchen demonstrate how to make a meal out of PLUS products.

In Marketing Tribune, Eric Leebeek, commercial director of PLUS, explained: 'We have been too modest in telling our stories to the customers. In our new communication strategy we introduce them to our vision on what good food is. Storytelling, in an accessible manner, is an important tool.' (Marketing Tribune, 2016)

A new advertising campaign through TV commercials was part of the new purpose marketing communication strategy. Those were no longer set inside the supermarket itself, with 'supermarket

employees' in the leading roles. The new setting for the messages were people's homes and kitchens.

In December 2017, PLUS launched a Christmas commercial on TV that went viral.

All three of the largest supermarkets (Albert Heijn, Jumbo and PLUS) had decided to appeal to the 'family feeling' that is part of Christmas. On social media, customers largely valued the Jumbo Christmas commercial that year as 'very cosy' and 'shows togetherness'. The Albert Heijn Christmas commercial was valued by many social media users in terms of 'showing the oldfashioned Christmas feeling'. The PLUS commercial, however, was judged as 'emotionally very intense' (#hakterin) and 'lump in throat' (#brokinkeel).

'I sit here crying over a Christmas commercial for God's sake!' commented one Facebook user.

The PLUS Christmas commercial told the story of a child moving between her divorced parents in the days before Christmas. She stays with the dad in his empty, sad apartment, and with the mum in a warm and cosy home in a comfortable life. After helping her mother decorate the big family Christmas tree, the little girl brings her father a cardboard box containing a miniature Christmas tree, under which she secretly places a handmade invitation to her mother's Christmas dinner.

When the dad shows up for the dinner on Christmas Eve, the invitation in his hand, the mother indeed welcomes him. The family is united, even if it will be only for that one evening. Then, the text appears on the screen: 'Christmas Tastes Better Together'.

The purpose marketing strategy was recognized by Adweek, , a leading source of international news for marketers with an audience of more than 6 million. (December 7th, 2017) 'Even if togetherness isn't the most original subject over the holiday season, it's nonetheless meaningful that advertising has stopped pretending the world is perfect, and has started addressing complex, real-world topics like divorce.' (Natividad, A., 2017)

Adweek asked PLUS' advertising agency JWT Amsterdam to comment: 'With this campaign we wanted to pay homage to the craft you see in the great Christmas ads [...] but then with a slightly different twist by not shying away from some of the more bittersweet feelings at this time of year.' According to an analyses of reactions on social media made by PLUS itself (published by Marketing Facts in August 2018) many people had recognized themselves in the situation and the characters in the Christmas commercial. They could identify with what they were seeing. PLUS had succeeded in putting itself in the middle of the Dutch community. (Mirck, J., 2018)

In the six months after the commercial was launched, it scored 700 mentions, with a potential reach of more than 4 millions social media users.

In a new commercial campaign, launched in August 2018, PLUS and JWT took the strategy of wanting to be in the middle of the Dutch community one step further. In what PLUS called a 'sunny follow up' of the Christmas 2017 commercial, they chose the refugee issue as the next theme. The story in the

new commercial was about the friendship between the Syrian boy Ismail who is introduced to the Dutch food culture by Lucas, a Dutch classmate. The boys befriend each other in school. Lucas takes the Syrian boy to playgrounds, soccerfields and a swimming pool and makes him taste all sorts of Dutch goodies, such as 'bitterballen', 'tompouces' and raw herring. Then Ismail brings Lucas to the asylum seekers centre where he lives with his family. There, Lucas is welcomed and served a Syrian meal. He tastes it and loves it. 'Eating well is eating together' is the motto.

Opinions about this second commercial were divided. Although the message of both commercials was the same (eating is better when you do it together), analyzing by PLUS itself, quoted in Marketing Facts (August 2018), learned that social media users watched the new commercial more critical than the commercial used for Christmas 2017. 'Overly politically correct', said a Twitter user. 'Wishful thinking', and 'fake', were other remarks. Creative strategist Nadine Ritter wrote on PLUS on her LinkedIn page: 'Do they organize dinners to make people eat together? What more do they do to stimulate integration? Do they adapt their assortment to make Syrians feel at home? Had deeds followed words, the campaign would have been clever, but now it is nothing more than a cute feelgood-commercial that has as little to do with reality than the average Dutch sitcom.'

However, for their audience of marketing professionals, Marketing Facts applauded the August 2018 commercial as 'a brave choice'. (Mirck, J., 2018)

Almost every local PLUS store has its own social media account, which promotes more local promotions and events. 'It fits with the PLUS goal of wanting to be for everyone in the Dutch community. It paints a picture of how we all want a multicultural community to look like', the platform said. (Mirck, J., 2018) The Dutch community is divided over the issue of refugees.

'Marketers who engage themselves in the public debate about multiculturalism take a risk of alienating consumers,' said Marketing Facts. 'The paradox is that the campaign aims to bring groups together. PLUS is politically correct and that is a good thing, but for others 'political correctness' is seen as something negative. Plus does not evade this tricky paradox. It deserves respect that it holds on to its choice for purpose-marketing.' (Mirck, J., 2018)

Results of the implementation of PLUS' new communication strategy of social media can be seen in analyzed using several sources.

Buzzcapture is a specialist in (online) media monitoring and online reputation management. It researches the popularity of Dutch supermarkets, online and on social media and will, therefore, be consulted for this part. The number of online messages about supermarkets in 2015, was measured with the 'Buzzcapture monitoringtool: 'a tool companies can use to inventorize their online mentions as well as in their reputation management'. (Consultancy.nl, 2016)

Nearly 800,000 messages were placed on social and online media about one of the twelve largest supermarkets in The Netherlands. Around 265,000 (34 per cent) of these were about Jumbo. Albert

Heijn came second with 259,000 mentions (32 per cent). Buzzcapture concludes that supermarket Jumbo was the most discussed online in 2015, where Albert Heijn was in second place.

(Consultancy.nl, 2016)

Jumbo's first place, however, was due largely to the sport sponsoring of the company and two incidents with explosives in two Jumbo stores in the city of Groningen (good for about 5 per cent). If these two elements (sports sponsoring and explosives) are excluded, Albert Heijn would have been the most mentioned supermarket in The Netherlands. (Buzzcapture results as published by Consultancy.nl, 2016)

Facebook and Twitter are most used channels by the twelve largest supermarkets in The Netherlands. On Facebook they have a shared 1,5 million likes and on Twitter they have more than 60,000 followers in total and the numbers of followers are growing.

On Facebook, according to Buzzcapture, Albert Heijn had 330,000 followers in 2015, and in 2018 this number had grown to 467,074, with an increase of 41,5 per cent.

Lidl went from 523,000 Facebook followers in 2015, to 717,727 followers in 2018. This is an increase of 37,2 per cent.

Jumbo had 363,000 Facebook followers in 2015. In 2018 this was 443,283. This was an increase of 22,1 per cent.

PLUS had 106,000 Facebook followers in 2015, and 134,291 in 2018. That is an increase of 26,7 per cent. (The results of 2015 were published in February 2016, amongst others by Consultancy.nl, and were compared to recent figures over a period of three years between 2015 and 2018.)

(Consultancy.nl, 2016)

On Twitter, according to Buzzcapture, Albert Heijn had 29,068 Twitter followers in 2015, and 41,507 at the end of 2018. This was an increase of 42,8 per cent.

Jumbo had 4,970 followers on Twitter in 2015, but this was at 12,412 in 2018, with an increase of 149,7 per cent.

Supermarket PLUS had 6,486 followers on Twitter in 2015. This increased to 8,379 followers in 2018; a growth of 29,4 per cent.

Lidl went from 129 Twitter followers in 2015, to 4,500 in 2018. This was an increase of 3,333.37 per cent. (Consultancy.nl, 2016)

PLUS Tweets cover a wide variety of subjects. Examples are:

'Clean your fridge thoroughly once every 3 months. This is how to avoid bacteria and food waste. A nice little job in the Christmas Holidays'. The tweet links to the [plus.nl/info](https://www.plus.nl/info) page on the PLUS site.

Another recent example is: 'Ready for a new job in the new year? At PLUS we have several job opening. In our stores, at our service office and in our distribution centres.' The tweet links to [Plus.nl/vacatures](https://plus.nl/vacatures) on the PLUS site. PLUS Tweets also offer many food related tips. An example is: 'Brussels sprouts are no longer the bitter vegetable of the past. Blanche en bake them for just a little while, or add a bit of honey.' A link directs the customers to plus.nl/recepten.

Many Tweets remind customers of the environment friendly choices PLUS makes in its company policy. An example: 'All our supermarkets are climate neutral. For example: we try to reduce our use of energy via our cooling systems'. Other tweets promote the PLUS app:

'Get a fast overview of our special offers, order online, scan barcodes en cook with a discount: all that can be done with our PLUS app. Download now via plus.nl/info-app2.

It is also relevant to research the social media channel of Instagram and compare that to Facebook. This is because the overall trend is in decrease of younger people on Facebook. More and more young people are active on Instagram. This has several reasons. One of the reasons is that young people feel less at home between the older people on Facebook. (MarketingFacts, 2018)

Another reason is the advertisements. Advertisements are good for a decrease of thirteen per cent. The younger generation find advertisements annoying. (MarketingFacts, 2018)

In addition, Instagram and also Snapchat are relatively new social media with new possibilities. At the end of December 2018, the official Instagram account of PLUS had 1045 posts and 7,819 followers.

The first post on Instagram was on January 26th, 2016. This was after PLUS switched to its new communication strategy of purpose-marketing. The new communication strategy contains more focus on 'Pure Food' and storytelling, and less on PLUS itself. Many posts were about healthy meals, holiday seasons, inspiration for recipes, and promotions. The purpose marketing strategy is reflected on the social media channels of PLUS. PLUS now responds to sentiments in the community.

On Instagram, pictures show more younger people and children, than pictures on Facebook do. When reactions on Facebook are analyzed, it can be concluded they contain more complaints. This could mean that the younger generations is less critical, or more easily satisfied. The complaints subjects vary from promotions, to advertisements, to environmental unfriendly packaging of certain products. For example, one of the complaints on Facebook was about a gadget connected to The Voice of Holland. In a PLUS promotion customers are encouraged to collect different gadgets. PLUS had not indicated that the gadget was not suitable for every phone brand and the child of the complainant was very disappointed. The message ended with: 'Greetings of a mother of a sad child.' (Indowtje, G., December 25th, 2018)

Many complaints on Facebook were about the recent Christmas commercials. 'What a TERRIBLE advertisement you have to be ashamed, marketing with sorrow and loss!!!!' (Frelih, G., December 23rd, 2018) Some people found them too much emotionally.

Instagram makes use of hashtags. This increases the reach of the message. Examples of commonly used hashtags from PLUS are: #supermarket, #goedeten #smakelijk #recept. Customers make use of the following hashtags to mention the supermarket PLUS: #plussupermarket, #plus.

Furthermore, the lay-outs are different on Facebook and Instagram. On Instagram, the photos are square within a certain frame, whereas on Facebook they are larger and can be zoomed in. According to the website Anotherconcept.nl, Instagram profiles can be compared with a book and all photos add up to a story and the focus is on creating and branding the brand story (storytelling). On Facebook, the focus is more on selling products. Facebook is primarily text, and individual messages are placed apart from each other, in contrary to Instagram, where images are primary.

(Anotherconcept.nl, Nd)

Japie Stoppelenburg, creative director at A Friend of Mine, a social media marketing agency, says that Facebook is more for the use of e-commerce and a service channel and that Instagram is good for the branding. (Mol, 2015)

Before the implementation of the new communication strategy of PLUS, the market shares of the supermarkets were as follows:

In 2015

Albert Heijn: 35,4 per cent;

Jumbo: 17,4 per cent;

Lidl: 10 per cent;

PLUS: 6,2 per cent.

After PLUS' implementation of the social media communication strategy in 2016, the results of the market shares were published in 2017.

Albert Heijn: 35,3 per cent;

Jumbo: 18,7 per cent;

Lidl: 10,5 per cent;

PLUS had 6,4 per cent.

PLUS itself analyzed the figures of 2017 as a result of its social entrepreneurship policy and its 'e-commerce'. (Distrifood, 2018) For 2018, there are results of the first six months available: PLUS went from 6,4 per cent to 6,41 per cent of the market share. PLUS analyzed this progress in 2018, as a

result of their online activities, including online shopping and the increased use of their customers of the PLUS application. (Marketing Tribune, 2016)

Analysis

From the research, there are some interesting things to point out and to discuss. The first research results show, according to the statistics of Statista, that it is generally foreseen that the usage of social media will only increase in the future. According to statistics of Statista, the number of users worldwide will increase from 2.62 billion in 2018 to 3.02 billion users in 2021. (Statista, 2018)

When we look at the trends and developments in the field of social media usage in The Netherlands, Statista claims that Whatsapp is the most widely used social media platform with 11.5 million users, of which 8.6 million daily users. (Statista, 2018) The top five of social media in The Netherlands, according to Statistics, are Whatsapp, Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn, and Instagram. (Statista, 2018)

This is going to change, because there is a shift of young users from Facebook to Instagram. More and more young people are active on Instagram. This has several reasons. One of the reasons is that young people feel less at home between the older people on Facebook. (MarketingFacts, 2018)

Another reason is the advertisements. Advertisements are good for a decrease of 13 per cent.

(MarketingFacts, 2018) In addition, Instagram and Snapchat are relatively new with new possibilities (MarketingFacts, 2018)

Another interesting aspect is the aging population in The Netherlands. The Netherlands is dealing with an aging population, which means that the elderly are harder to reach for retailers. Still, The Netherlands is the digital leader in Europe with its own Dutch digitization strategy. The digital gap, the difference between generations growing up with and without technology innovation, however, is decreasing. De Vries said: 'This gap is getting smaller in The Netherlands, but is still strong worldwide.' (De Vries, 2013)

Further, another interesting aspect is the increased use of a social media strategy by retailers. PLUS makes use of Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram. PLUS, therefore, make use of the all three strategies: Customer Intimacy which is part of the Value Strategies of Treacy and Wiersema, the eight steps of Lepage and Newberry, and the six steps of R2H. This is shown in the new communication strategy, which PLUS implements since 2016. Since then, PLUS' market share went from 6,2 per cent in 2015 to 6,41 per cent in 2018. This growth, according to PLUS, is due to its focus on communicating about its sustainable entrepreneurship policy on social media, and other online activities.

Conclusion

After this research, the central question can be answered. It can be concluded that the implementation of a new communication strategy in 2016 with a focus on social media, had positive outcomes in market share for PLUS supermarkets. PLUS went from 6,2 per cent in 2015 to 6,41 per cent in 2018 of the market share. The growth of the market share went from 0,2 per cent in 2015, to 0,21 per cent in 2018. PLUS analyses this growth as a result of their increased online activities, including online shopping, and an increase in the use of their PLUS application. (Marketing Tribune, 2018) In the same period, supermarket Albert Heijn, who is the market leader in The Netherlands, lost a part of its market share with 0,1 per cent.

Another conclusion that can be drawn that it makes a difference which social media channels are chosen by retailers. The most appropriate type of social media used by PLUS supermarkets in The Netherlands depends on which target groups they want to reach. On December 18th, 2018, supermarket PLUS had 137,690 followers on Facebook, 7,594 followers on Instagram and on Youtube 2,748 subscribers. Based on these numbers, Facebook has the biggest impact for PLUS, and is, therefore, the most suitable for the PLUS target group.

Finally, for retailers in The Netherlands, it has never been more important to be active online, because the Dutch people are too increasingly. Approximately 73 per cent of Dutch people are active on the internet on a daily basis, compared to 68 per cent in 2016. (Pieters, J., 2018). Statista claims that the top five of social media in The Netherlands are Whatsapp with 11,5 million users in total of which 8.5 million users on daily basis, Facebook with 10,8 million users in total, of which 7,6 million users on daily basis, Youtube with 8 million users in total, of which 2,2 million users on daily basis, LinkedIn with 4,4 million users in total, of which 0,5 million users on daily basis, and Instagram with 4,1 million users in total, of which 2,1 million users on daily basis). (Statista, 2018) Social media are a necessary tool in retailers' marketing strategies.

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Appendices

Appendix 6.3 – European Studies Student Ethics Form

European Studies Student Ethics Form

Your name: Neal Voorsluijs

Supervisor: D. Diojdescu

Instructions/checklist Before completing this form you should read the APA Ethics Code (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>). If you are planning research with human subjects you should also look at the sample consent form available in the Final Project and Dissertation Guide.

- a. ☐ Read section 3 that your supervisor will have to sign. Make sure that you cover all these issues in section 1.
- b. ☐ Complete sections 1 and, if you are using human subjects, section 2, of this form, and sign it.
- c. ☐ Ask your project supervisor to read these sections (and the draft consent form if you have one) and sign the form.
- d. ☐ Append this signed form as an appendix to your dissertation. Section 1. Project Outline (to be completed by student)

(i) Title of Project: Implementation of social media in business strategies in the retail sector in The Netherlands

(ii) Aims of project: Because of its growing importance in today's business as well as in the businesses of the future, I explore the question how the retail sector could use this digital tool to reach their target group best.

(iii) Will you involve other people in your project – e.g. via formal or informal interviews, group discussions, questionnaires, internet surveys etc. (Note: if you are using data that has already been collected by another researcher – e.g. recordings or transcripts of conversations given to you by your supervisor, you should answer 'NO' to this question.)

~~YES~~ / NO

If no: you should now sign the statement below and return the form to your supervisor. You have completed this form. This project is not designed to include research with human subjects . I

understand that I do not have ethical clearance to interview people (formally or informally) about the topic of my research, to carry out internet research (e.g. on chat rooms or discussion boards) or in any other way to use people as subjects in my research.

Student's signature _____ date _____

If yes: you should complete the rest of this form. Section 2 Complete this section only if you answered YES to question (iii) above. (i) What will the participants have to do? (v. brief outline of procedure):

(ii) What sort of people will the participants be and how will they be recruited?

(iii) What sort stimuli or materials will your participants be exposed to, tick the appropriate boxes and then state what they are in the space below? Questionnaires[]; Pictures[]; Sounds []; Words[]; Other[].

(iv) Consent: Informed consent must be obtained for all participants before they take part in your project. By means of an informed consent form you should state what participants will be doing, drawing attention to anything they could conceivably object to subsequently. You should also state how they can withdraw from the study at any time and the measures you are taking to ensure the confidentiality of data. A standard informed consent form is available in the Dissertation Manual. (vi) What procedures will you follow in order to guarantee the confidentiality of participants' data?

Student's signature: date: January 7th, 2019

Supervisor's signature (if satisfied with the proposed procedures): date: January 7th, 2019

Appendix 6.4 – Informed Consent Form, Informed Consent Form 1) Project Title 2)

Project Description (1 paragraph) If you agree to take part in this study, please read the following statement and sign this form. I am 16 years of age or older. I can confirm that I have read and understood the description and aims of this research. The researcher has answered all the questions that I had to my satisfaction. I agree to the audio recording of my interview with the researcher. I understand that the researcher offers me the following guarantees: All information will be treated in the strictest confidence. My name will not be used in the study unless I give permission for it. Recordings will be accessible only by the researcher and relevant university assessors. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured at all times. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions. I can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time and anything to be deleted from it. I consent to take part in the research on the basis of the guarantees outlined above.

Signed: _____ Date: _____-01-2019_____