MSc in Marketing

Airline consumers’ use of Twitter for customer service: The case of Icelandair

June, 2017
Kristjana Arnarsdóttir
160890-2749
Kjartan Sigurðsson
AIRLINE CONSUMERS’ USE OF TWITTER FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE: THE CASE OF ICELANDAIR

Author:
Kristjana Arnarsdóttir
Reykjavik University
June 2017

Supervisor:
Kjartan Sigurðsson
Declaration of Research Work Integrity

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently being submitted in candidature for any degree. This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged with explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

By signing the present document, I confirm and agree that I have read RU’s ethics code of conduct and fully understand the consequences of violating these rules in connection with my thesis.

Date and Place

ID No.

Signature
Abstract

This exploratory case study uses an interpretative phenomenological approach to explore how and why Icelandair consumers utilize Twitter as a platform to communicate with the brand. The competition within the airline industry is high and in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors, airlines need to gain a better understanding of their consumers to improve the quality of their service. With the increased usage of social media, companies are beginning to integrate these platforms into their marketing strategy. Twitter is a social media platform that has gained prominence as a communication channel between consumers and brands. Twitter is a public platform, therefore making it easy for others to observe interactions. This voluntary exposure adds an increased pressure for companies to do well in a demanding environment. The Icelandic airline Icelandair was chosen as a case study since the airline industry is one of the most active industries on social media and airline consumers rely heavily on customer service. The author conducted ten semi-structured in-depth interviews with Icelandair’s consumers that all had contacted the airline on Twitter. The interviews were analyzed with an interpretative phenomenological approach were themes were identified and the transcribed data interpreted. Findings offer insights into how consumers perceive the Twitter platform as a communication channel. The interviews with Icelandair’s consumers provide a deeper understanding of what consumers value when they communicate with brands on Twitter. With a better understanding of their consumers, Icelandair can improve their marketing strategies on Twitter.

Keywords: social media, Twitter, case study, interpretative phenomenological analysis, IPA, customer service
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Kjartan Sigurðsson, for great supervision, guidance and inspiration during this process. I would also like to thank Hákon Ágústsson and Sarah Unnsteinsdóttir at Icelandair for providing me with the necessary information and data. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their endless support over the last few months. Without it, this would not have been possible.
# Table of Contents

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 8  
1.1 Research structure .................................................................................................................. 12  

2. Literature review ....................................................................................................................... 13  
2.1. Social media .......................................................................................................................... 13  
2.2. Marketing on social media .................................................................................................... 14  
2.3. eWOM ..................................................................................................................................... 15  
2.4. Uses and gratification theory ................................................................................................. 16  

3. Twitter as a social media ............................................................................................................ 18  
3.1. Twitter features ...................................................................................................................... 19  
   3.1.1 Tweeting ............................................................................................................................. 19  
   3.1.2. Liking ................................................................................................................................ 20  
   3.1.3. Replying .......................................................................................................................... 20  
   3.1.4. Retweeting ....................................................................................................................... 20  
   3.1.5. Direct messaging ............................................................................................................. 21  
3.2. Customer service on Twitter ................................................................................................. 21  

4. Icelandair ................................................................................................................................... 23  
4.1. Icelandair on Twitter .............................................................................................................. 24  

5. Methodology ............................................................................................................................. 28  
5.1. Qualitative methodology ....................................................................................................... 30  
5.2. Interpretative phenomenological analysis ............................................................................. 30  
5.3. In-depth interviews ................................................................................................................. 31  

6. Interview themes ....................................................................................................................... 35  
6.1. Entertainment ......................................................................................................................... 35  
6.2. Creative and personal ............................................................................................................. 37  
   6.2.1. Response content ............................................................................................................. 39  
   6.2.2. Following .......................................................................................................................... 40  
6.3. Quick and simple .................................................................................................................... 42  
   6.3.1. Response time .................................................................................................................. 43  
6.4. Public ....................................................................................................................................... 45  
6.5. Service expectations ............................................................................................................. 47  

7. Discussion ................................................................................................................................. 50  

8. Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 52  
8.1. Managerial implications ........................................................................................................ 54
8.2. Limitations and further research ................................................................. 54
9. References ........................................................................................................ 56
Appendix A ........................................................................................................... 67
Appendix B ........................................................................................................... 68
Appendix C ........................................................................................................... 69
Appendix D ........................................................................................................... 70
List of tables

Table 1. Academic literature on airlines and Twitter ...........................................15
Table 2. The primary communication channel Twitter users choose to contact brands 29
Table 3. Twitter poll on average response time for brands .................................29
Table 4. Twitter interview participants ................................................................33
Table 5. Phases and timeframe of data gathering ..................................................34
Table 6. Themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews ...............................35
1 Introduction

Social media has revolutionized the way people communicate. These platforms are in constant development and new social media platforms are emerging at a rapid pace. Social media usage is constantly growing and today 30% of the time spent online consists of the time spent on social media platforms (Asano, 2017). The increase of social media usage has opened up new opportunities for companies to advertise and promote their businesses, handle customer service related problems and engage with customers through different social media platforms. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter are two important platforms that have introduced new ways for consumers to interact with brands and vice versa to create customer value (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2012).

Companies have seen their consumers acknowledging these platforms as communication channels for customer service. It is therefore important that companies know what motivates consumers to utilize the public Twitter platform to communicate with brands. Furthermore, it is important to understand how consumers want companies to respond so that both parties can benefit from this communication.

Before the existence of social media, mass communication through media channels such as radio and television allowed businesses to ‘speak’ to their customers (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Social media has changed how people communicate and companies are constantly trying to understand how social media is impacting their brands. Companies can now observe their consumers online and see what they think about their brand, creating both possibilities and challenges for the organization.

Customer service on social media has been maturing over the last few years and social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have both acknowledged this trend. Both platforms have added features that enable brands and consumers to communicate more easily. A recent survey estimated that 89% of companies rely on customer service as their number one way of competition (Strachle, Roth & Herr, 2015).

Smartphones have also fueled this trend. With 95% of the global population living in an area covered by mobile-cellular network (ICT, 2016), smartphones have become the number one device for getting online with more than a third of all adults using their smartphones in less than five minutes of waking up (Ofcom, 2015). This has led to consumers shifting from the more traditional customer service tools like call centers and emails to social media (Lesser, 2017). Moreover, research shows that those that tend to be more shy, or have higher levels of social anxiety, are more comfortable with using
computer mediated communication when connecting with others (McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002). In 2015, American smartphone users were sending and receiving five times as many text messages compared to the number of phone calls every day (Infomate, 2015). Customers who engage with companies on social media have proven to be more loyal and they spend up to 40% more with companies that are interactive on their social media platforms compared to other customers (Barry, Markey, Almquist & Brahm, 2011). This knowledge may have led companies in the airline industry to put more emphasis on social media because of the potential business opportunities involved.

Consumers nowadays want to choose their own channel for contacting brands where they expect fast and consistent answers (Eptica, 2016). Furthermore, consumers are becoming more demanding and now they seem to be in control of the consumer-brand relationship, controlling every aspect of the conversation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). With the increasing number of social media platforms, the number of ways for consumers to contact companies are likely to increase. This means that meeting customer expectations is vital for companies to differentiate themselves from the competition and building a loyal relationship with their consumers.

Social media has also enabled consumers to talk to one another on these platforms (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), which can create new problems for companies as they now need to be present on social media to keep track of their consumers. This has proven to be a challenge for companies. According to Eptica Multichannel Customer Experience Study (2016) companies are failing to deliver multichannel customer service. Emailing is still the primary communication channel for consumers (Bluecore, 2016). However, the email channel is becoming less accurate and slower while Facebook and Twitter are increasing in accuracy and response rate (Eptica, 2016).

The airline industry is one of the most active industries on social media and it is the highest ranked sector in terms of usage and customer interaction both on Facebook and Twitter (Social Bakers, 2013). In a way, airlines provide a different product than other businesses, where consumers are in contact with the airline in many phases; before they decide to travel, when they purchase their ticket, in the booking process, at the airport, during the flight itself and post-travel, creating many touchpoints for the airlines. These distinctive features of service require airlines to understand the expectations and needs of consumers. Many airlines have adopted social media into their marketing strategy and in 2016, customer service was the number one focus of airlines on social media (SimpliFlying, 2016), indicating that that these platforms are more than just tools
for marketing purposes. In 2015, a research team from Twitter analyzed public interactions between airlines and their customers. The results showed that customers who received replies from airlines on Twitter showed an increased satisfaction with their experience and were as a result more likely to recommend the airline and willing to pay more for an airline ticket in the future (Huang, 2015). Therefore, providing this service through social media can not only improve customer satisfaction, it can also have a financial impact.

Icelandair, the oldest international airline in Iceland, is active on multiple social media platforms and focuses heavily on their social media marketing. The increasing usage of social media in customer service and heavy usage of social media usage within the airline industry, was the main reason for why Icelandair was chosen as a case for this research.

The reasons that motivate people to use social networking platforms have become a central topic within the studies of social media. Studies have found entertainment to be an important factor for sharing and consuming content on social networking sites (Sheldon, 2008; LaRose et al., 2001) and Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found social connections and information sharing to be motivating factors.

The objective of this research is to contribute to the scarce research on consumers’ perspectives regarding airline brands on Twitter. To address this gap, the aim of this research is to explore, through an in-depth phenomenological case study approach, how and why Icelandair consumers utilize Twitter to seek information from the airline brand Icelandair and what consumers value in the consumer-brand communication.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that qualitative research allows the researcher to understand how meanings are formed. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used as a method to analyze the in-depth interviews that were conducted. IPA was chosen as a qualitative research method because of its nature as a framework that explores deeper meanings and offers detailed, rich descriptions from the participants (Geertz, 1973).

To the authors best knowledge, no research has been done using an interpretative phenomenological analysis within a case study research to understand why consumers engage in a conversation with brands on Twitter. Phenomenology is used to seek meaning, structure and essence (Patton, 2002) of a human phenomenon that is driven from a living experience (van Manen, 1997). Since social media are a social phenomenon, phenomenology can shed light on how consumers experience Twitter in relations to
brands. When gathering information on the subject at hand, Twitter was used in various ways to gain more insights from Twitter users. Twitter allows for the option that individual users can run a poll on their own profile which then displays in the Twitter feed like any other tweet. The Twitter poll can range from two to four different answering options, where the time length of polls on Twitter can range from one hour to seven days. In addition to the in-depth interviews conducted, the author ran two polls on Twitter to collect data.

Through an interpretative phenomenological approach, the author seeks to answer the following research questions. Two research questions are addressed:

**R1:** What are the benefits for airline brands of communicating with consumers on Twitter?

**R2:** How does Twitter affect an airline brands quality of service?

This research contributes to an improved understanding of Twitter users, which constitutes a potential means for airline brands to relate to their consumers, whether this is done with the aim of improving customer services, or an intermediate aim of improving its relationship with social media users, in this case Twitter.
1.1 Research structure

The research is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter has covered the introduction while the second chapter will review the literature related to the subject of this thesis. An overview of Twitter will be provided in the third chapter, where the functions of the platform will be explained in detail. The fourth chapter will cover a brief overview of Icelandair as well as in-depth interviews with two project- and marketing managers at Icelandair. In the fifth chapter, the methodology used for this research will be presented and why certain methods were considered. The themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews will be presented in the sixth chapter and a further discussion provided in chapter seven. Finally, the conclusion will be covered in the eighth and final chapter.
2. Literature review

Social media has had a tremendous impact on how people communicate. With the emergence of these new technologies, such as social media and smartphones, it can be argued that we are in a whole new communication landscape (Kietzmann, McCarthy, Silvestre, 2011). Social media is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (“Social media,” n.d.). The main difference between social media and the Internet at its early stage, is the availability and the accessibility of free and easy-to-use online platforms for publishing, editing and sharing various content that enables interactive changes between individuals and groups (O’leary, 2011). Internet users can now create new content and react to the content of other users. This means that users are no longer passive spectators on the World Wide Web. Instead they are active participants in shaping the content which is published online where individuals are nowadays responsible for a large sum of the overall content of the Internet.

2.1. Social media

Social media are mobile and web-based technologies that have created interactive platforms with a tremendous amount of user-generated content (Kietzmann et al, 2011). Social networking sites are platforms where users can create a social relationship with people from all around the world, whether the relationship is built on common interests, activities or mere curiosity. These sites enable users to make their own personal profiles, connect with other users and brands, as well as upload content on their own newsfeeds (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Despite of these sites having distinctive characteristics, most of them share features like being accessible through mobile devices as well as the ability to share photos, videos, and messages with other users in their network.

The number of social media platforms has increased rapidly in recent years where a large number of messages is transmitted through these media every day. Yet, it has proven challenging to find a systematic way to further categorize these platforms. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorized social media into blogs, social networking sites, collaborative projects, content communities, virtual social worlds, and virtual game worlds. Brands across various industries are using social media effectively in their marketing strategy and the social media usage within the airline industry has matured at a rapid pace in recent years (SimpliFlying, 2016).
2.2. Marketing on social media

Social media has impacted consumer behavior where they have provided a new marketing landscape and consumers are taking on a more active role as marketers (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremle, 2004). Today, a whole generation has grown up spending nearly all of their lives in a digital environment (Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008). This generation is attached to their mobile devices with everything being shared or searched for on social media and interacting with others through social media has become the key (Palfrey & Gasser, 2013).

In today’s competitive marketing environment, most companies have incorporated social media into their marketing strategy. These new platforms can add to numerous marketing activities such as customer relationship management, customer service, branding, buyer research, as well as sales promotion delivery channels. The distinctive features of social media also enable brands to be more personal when communicating with consumers. By exhibiting humanness and warmth, companies can encourage consumers to seek a continuing relationship with brands (Malone & Fiske, 2013) in their communication on social media.

In an industry report by Social Media Examiner (2016), 90% of businesses said that social media was important to their businesses. However, 40% of marketers said that marketing on social media had become more difficult than from the 12 months’ prior (Stelzner, 2016). Facebook still proved to be the most popular social media platform with 93% of brands using it for marketing purposes, followed by Twitter with 76% and LinkedIn with 67% (Stelzner, 2016). According to another recent study, social media is the best option for consumers that want answers to their queries, with Twitter and Facebook being more accurate and faster than email (Eptica, 2016).

Smith, Fischer & Yongjian (2012) examined the differences in brand-related content, generated by users, between the social media platforms Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. They found that people used Twitter to engage in discussions and spread news, and that users were willing to use the channel to communicate with marketers.

Twitter has also proven to be an effective marketing tool for airlines. In 2015, a Twitter research (Huang, 2015) showed that replying to tweets had a revenue-generating potential within the airline industry. When the airline brand responded, consumers were willing to pay around $9.00 more on average for that specific airline and when the airline
brand responded in less than six minutes, the consumer was willing to pay up to $20.00 more in the future (Huang, 2015).

Academic literature on Twitter is still growing. Williams, Terras & Warwick (2013) classified Twitter related academic papers and found out that most published work focused on the aspects of the sent messages, or tweets, on Twitter and details of the users. Literature relating to airline brands and Twitter have mainly focused on analyzing tweets that are available to the public.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fan, Y. &amp; Niu, R. H.</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td>Findings showed that agents’ responses that did not require customers to take further initiatives in solving a problem had positive effects on customer emotion alleviation and satisfaction. Responses that needed further direction had negative effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yee Liau, B., &amp; Pei Tan, P.</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Text mining</td>
<td>Findings revealed that the four main topics discussed by airline consumers were customer service, ticket promotion, cancellation and delays, and post-booking management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misopoulos, F., Mitic, M.,</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Sentiment analysis</td>
<td>Findings showed that positive sentiment was mostly related to online and mobile check-in services, prices and flight experience. Negative sentiments were related to companies’ websites, delays and lost luggage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapoulas, A., &amp; Karapiperis, C.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Findings showed that microblogging users shared compliments, marketing related content, personal updates and information. Airlines used microblogs for marketing, socializing and to share information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sreenivasan, Lee &amp; Goh.</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3. eWOM

Word-of-mouth marketing (WOM) is the art and science of building active, mutually beneficial consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-marketer communications (Aaker et. al, 2013). These consumer-to-consumer interactions are important for brands, as word-of-mouth is the most persuasive form of promotion (Kumar, Petersen & Leone, 2007). Research has shown that word-of-mouth on social media can be beneficial to companies (Jin & Phua, 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This online word-of-mouth marketing (eWOM), is defined as being “any positive or negative statement made by a
potential, actual, or former customers about a product or a company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; p.39).

The increased usage of social media has made it easier for information to spread, no longer being limited by boundaries of demographics. Nowadays, customers can talk to hundreds, or even thousands, of friends by simply writing a few words on social media and a person who has many followers on social media can help make or break a brand with a few keystrokes. It is therefore vital for brands to be aware of these influencers on social media. The wrong response, or maybe no response at all, might become damaging whereas the right response can boost the brand (Tripp & Grégoire, 2011).

A new form of eWOM marketing is the use of microblogging platforms like Twitter. Twitter is a public social media platform, allowing users to post short comments or messages. This affects eWOM communication since users can share thoughts about brands at any given time, either to show support for a particular brand or a product or to explain why a product or a company failed.

One of the most interesting things about Twitter is the fact that a user has limited space to express his opinion. The standard length of a microblog is of similar length as a typical newspaper headline, meaning that it is easy for other users to produce and consume the content (Milstein, Chowdhury, Hochmuth, Lorica, & Magoulas, 2008). Therefore, eWOM can be more powerful than WOM since the message is immediate, it has a significant reach, it has certain credibility being in print, and others can access it more easily (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). According to Lu, Fan & Zhou (2016), eWOM is estimated to be $900 billion to $1,3 trillion in value where it is influencing one third of consumer spending. Since social media is here to stay, monitoring and understanding microblogs like Twitter is critical for businesses as eWOM can have an impact on brand image and awareness.

2.4. Uses and gratification theory

With the rise of social media, new ways of online communication have emerged. Research shows that online communication promotes relationship building and improves communication between parties (Kiesler, 1997). To understand how online communication promotes relationship building and how it can improve communication, uses and gratification will be applied for the interpretation of user motivations.
Uses and gratification theory (U&G) is an audience-centered approach that has been used to interpret and understand the motivations and goals of individuals in their engagement with different forms of content (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). The main elements of U&G include the psychological and social environment, the needs and motives to communicate, the attitudes and expectations about the media, and our communication behavior and the outcome of our behavior (Rubin, 2009).

The U&G approach has been proven to support the idea that people actively seek out to gratify the need to connect with others on social media platforms and that the media choice of each individual is a combination of psychological and sociological factors (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Research on U&G has shed light on how various media are used to satisfy affective and cognitive needs that involve both personal and entertainment needs (Rubin, 2009) allowing individuals to reach gratifications such as social interaction and reward, knowledge enhancement, entertainment and relaxation, and remuneration (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005).

With the constant increase of users on social media more and more individuals are using these platforms to satisfy their cognitive and affective needs. The amount of literature on U&G research in relations to social media is growing. Researchers such as Bumgarner (2007) and Park, Kee & Valenzuela (2009) have examined how and why people use these media and the motivations behind it. Research shows that the general motivations for using the Internet are similar; information, entertainment, convenience and social interaction (Ko et al., 2005; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Alhabash and McAlister (2014) grouped motivations for using social networking sites into five categories, cognitive (information), entertainment (relaxing, diversion), social connection (social utility, companionship, relationship maintenance, social interaction, inclusion), habitual use (passing time), and identity (self-expression, recognition).

In this research, U&G theory will be used to further support the IPA method in explaining the motives for individuals using Twitter as a social media.
3. Twitter as a social media

Twitter is an online social media platform, more specifically a microblogging service, that since 2006 has enabled users to publish short updates, called ‘tweets’. Originally, Twitter was an all-text platform were users could compose a tweet in a box on the left side of Twitter’s online interface, were users were asked to answer the question ‘What are you doing right now?’ (Chen, 2011). Twitter later moved the box to the top of users’ timeline and changing the box itself, now asking users ‘What’s happening?’, which resembles ‘What’s on your mind?’ status update box on Facebook (Whitney, 2014). Twitter also changed its functions so that users were no longer restricted to uploading texts. Now users can upload content in various forms, such as text, pictures, videos, links, or ads (Kumar, 2015). A user’s Twitter feed displays content from users that are being followed in a reversed chronological order. The tweets can be up to 140 characters long but users can also use the platform to contact other users via direct messages. This type of microblogging allows users to discuss various topics with people all around the world with a faster mode, compared to regular blogging. These short posts lower the requirement of time and thought investment (Java, Song, Finin & Tseng, 2007).

Twitter is an interesting platform for marketers since consumers reflect on firm-related and brand-related matters in real time (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Jansen et al. 2009). Monthly active users on Twitter in the first quarter of 2017 were approximately 328 million, whereas active users in the fourth quarter of 2016 were 319 million, an increase of 9 million users between the quarters (Statista, 2017). According to recent demographics, 24% of online American adults use Twitter (Greenwood, Perrin & Duggan, 2016), with adults aged from 18-29 being three times as likely to be on Twitter compared to adults aged from 65 years or older. The development of Twitter in Iceland has not been as rapid. According to the most recent statistics, around 16% of adults aged 18 and over in Iceland used Twitter (Nútíminn, 2015). Icelandic companies are also less active on Twitter compared to companies in the USA. In 2014, social media usage was measured within 34 Icelandic companies where 40% of them used Twitter for marketing purposes (Jón H. Borsteinsson, 2014). In USA however, 65.8% of companies used Twitter for online marketing (Smith, 2017). Twitter is neither the most popular social media platform nor the largest, but it has distinctive features that are beneficial for companies. Additionally, Twitter has the benefit of being the most transparent social media today (Parmar, 2015).
Twitter’s own search engine allows users to search for specific words or hashtags, making it easier for companies to monitor their brands. Companies also have the option to target their advertising to users on social media. Sponsored posts, or paid advertising, on social media has increased in popularity in recent years but organic posts still play an important role in user engagement (Safran 2014). Therefore, it is up to brands to decide on whether they promote their published content or rely on organic reach from consumers.

The default setting of Twitter is that it is a public platform, making it unique in the sense that consumers can voice their thoughts, in either a positive or a negative sense, giving other consumers the opportunity to observe or respond. However, users can make their accounts protected and therefore choosing who can view the content being posted. That is, Twitter user can access and engage with content from other Twitter users, if the Twitter user is not blocked from viewing another user's profile or that a user has not locked his or her profile. Twitter users decide on who to follow. When a user gains a new follower, he or she can decide whether to follow back or not. Meaning that the relationship of those following and those being followed requires no reciprocation. Deciding on who to follow is up to the user, some only follow people they know while others follow celebrities, brands and strangers.

3.1. Twitter features

Members of Twitter communicate with each other by tweeting, liking, replying, retweeting and messaging (Purohit, Ajmera, Joshi, Verma & Sheth, 2012). The actions, tweeting, liking, replying, and retweeting, are available to all users of Twitter, whether they are individuals or brands. The actions of Twitter will be further explained to give a better understanding of how individuals use this social media platform, especially in relations to brands.

3.1.1 Tweeting

When a user decides to publish any form of content on Twitter it is called tweeting. Tweets flow from the user to his followers, appearing both on the user’s feed as well as those of his followers (Chu, Gianvecchio, Wang & Jajodia, 2010). When a user wants to include another user in their tweet, or simply start a conversation with another user, he or she uses the “@user” syntax to address them (Boyd, Golder & Lotan, 2010; Honey & Herring, 2009). By doing that, users can engage in a conversation where all included
parties are alerted with a notification when a tweet with their “@user” syntax has been posted. Users can also include hashtags on Twitter as they help associate Twitter posts with a certain topic. A hashtag is prefixed with a # symbol and a certain keyword. Therefore, a shared hashtag can collect Internet resources across websites, for example as related to this thesis, Icelandair can for example monitor hashtags that are linked to the airline by using the hashtag #icelandair. Icelandair has also launched campaigns that have specific hashtags to them, #MyStopover being one, where the hashtag is used to increase brand awareness.

3.1.2. Liking

One of the first actions available to users on Twitter was the like button. The like button, initially referred to as the favorite button, was thought of as a way for users to bookmark tweets. It was later changed to a button where users could express their approval of an opinion or “like” an opinion or a tweet (Oremus, 2015). Liking has become a known feature on multiple social media platforms like Facebook, which introduced its like button in 2009, followed by platforms like Instagram, a photo-sharing application that allows users to share pictures and videos.

3.1.3. Replying

Like mentioned above, Twitter users can reply to tweets posted by other users with the “@user” syntax. Users can also mention other users beforehand, without replying to anything. This has become known as “tagging” or “mentioning”. By tagging or mentioning, users can get in direct contact with brands whether they have a customer service related enquiry or if they want to give a positive, or a negative, feedback in relations with the brand at hand.

3.1.4. Retweeting

Retweeting is the action of re-posting a tweet that was initially posted by another user. By retweeting, a user reposts the tweet to his own Twitter feed. Furthermore, the user shares someone else’s content to his own followers. Retweeting can often lead to content becoming viral at an incredible pace. This form of spreading content on social media can become harming for brands, for example, in April 2017, a passenger was dragged out of United Airlines’ airplane scheduled to fly from Chicago’s O’Hare Airport
to Louisville, Kentucky (Yan, Zdanowich & Emanuella, 2017). Four passengers were asked to give up their seats on an overbooked flight so that crew members on another flight could travel to Louisville. Three passengers agreed on leaving but one refused, resulting in drastic measures. While the passenger was being dragged out by security officers, other passengers recorded the incident and uploaded to social media.

The original tweet posted of the incident had received more than 23,000 retweets only three days after the incident itself (See Appendix D) (Yan, Zdanowich & Emanuella, 2017). Other United Airline customers posted content on Twitter to express their anger towards the airline, one of them cutting his new frequent flyer loyalty card into pieces saying “My new #united card. Not planning to fly them anymore after this: http://cnn.it/2oTmcRe. 1k bye bye” (Perfetto, 2017). The incident sparked an outrage and as a result, three airlines changed their policies to prevent this from happening again (CBS News, 2017).

3.1.5. Direct messaging

The direct messaging option on Twitter is the private side of the platform where users can have a private conversation with one or more user, not having the conversation appear in the users’ feed. Users can have a private conversation with anyone that follows them. Most brands however can receive direct messages from anyone (Twitter, 2017). By using this feature, airline consumers can include more detailed information without having to publicly share it in their own feed.

3.2. Customer service on Twitter

According to a research done by Twitter in 2015, customer service was listed as one of the main reasons for why Twitter users follow brands on that platform (Elrhoul, 2015). Customer service has been defined as the “transactions aimed at meeting the needs and expectations of the customer, as defined by the customer” (Salas, 2006, p. 4).

Customers on Twitter have high expectations of response rate; 53% of those that expect a brand to response to their tweet demand that a response is provided in less than an hour (Lithium, 2013) with the percentage increasing to 72% when these customers have complaints (Lithium, 2013). Naturally, companies would like to maximize visibility of positive eWOM, while wanting to limit the visibility of negative eWOM. Negative eWOM from consumers can often occur when consumers are unsatisfied with a service
experience. However, when consumers recover from an unsatisfied service experience it can lead to positive word-of-mouth, where the loyalty towards the brand is maintained, leading to repurchasing in the future (de Matos, Rossi, Veiga & Viera, 2009). It is therefore important that brands know how to respond when a consumer has a complaint. Babbar and Koufteros (2008) state that individual attention, helpfulness, courtesy and promptness, all have a significant effect on customer satisfaction, as well as apology and empathy (Miller, Craighead & Karwan, 2000).

In a podcast recorded in 2017, Jeff Lesser, product marketing manager at Twitter, said that the company started a customer service initiative as a result of seeing millions of users on Twitter reaching out to businesses to get help. Twitter initially did not have any features that facilitated to this need. Twitter has now added features like ‘customer feedback’ and other features to assist businesses on Twitter to better connect with its customers. Lesser (2017) also covered the key traits of a socially matured brands on Twitter. He stated that social media agents that respond to enquiries on Twitter need to be able to resolve the issue and on the channel that they requested assistance, i.e. if a user chooses Twitter for assistance, it is important to keep the issue and resolve it on the platform. Agents need to be able to resolve the issue and do whatever is required to find a resolution. Brands need to handle the enquires at a personal note so that the consumer does not feel that he is getting an automatic response from a robot (Lesser, 2017). Another important aspect is that the brand management and service team need to handle every enquiry the same way and answer everyone in the same matter. The brands that manage to reach this maturity can create great experiences for he consumers.
4. Icelandair

The airline brand Icelandair is Icelandair Group’s largest subsidiary. It operates a fleet of Boeing 757 and 767 jets on scheduled routes between Europe and North America. In a typical element of Icelandair’s Route Network, an aircraft departs from Keflavik Airport in the morning and heads off to Europe. It will then return to Keflavik and continue westward to North America in the afternoon and return to Keflavik the morning after (Icelandair Group Annual Report, 2015). In 2016, Icelandair’s Route Network connected 27 European airports with 16 North American airports through the airline’s hub in Keflavik. In 2017, Icelandair celebrates its 80-year anniversary within aviation (Icelandair, 2017-a).

Icelandair is the leading airline in Iceland and it differentiates itself from its competitors with its wide range of services. For many years, Icelandair has offered three travel classes on-board; Economy Class, Economy Comfort and Saga Class. Economy Class is the standard travel class, where consumers are provided with standardized leg-room, an in-flight entertainment system and a range of complementary non-alcoholic beverages, with a selection of meals and other refreshments offered for sale. Economy Comfort is an upgrade from Economy Class, offering an in-flight entertainment system, additional leg-room, a complementary meal and beverages, access to priority check-in and lounge access. Finally, Saga Class, a quiet cabin at the front of the aircraft, offers consumers priority check-in, lounge access, additional leg-room, noise cancelling headphones, a pre-flight drink, duvet cover for overnight journeys, as well as a selection of wines and meals (Icelandair, 2017-b). In addition to the range of travel classes, Icelandair offers consumers a reward program, Saga Club, where members can redeem Saga Points for all flights, earn and spend points on board, book hotels or rent a car with partner companies, or upgrade their flight ticket to the next travel class (Icelandair, 2017-c).

Icelandair engages with its consumers in many ways and the brand is active on various social media platforms, for example Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn. The aim of this thesis is to examine Icelandair’s consumers on Twitter. Therefore, the following chapter will explain more in-depth how Icelandair uses Twitter in their social media marketing strategy.
4.1. Icelandair on Twitter

The author of this thesis interviewed two managers at Icelandair, Hákon Ágústsson, project manager, and Sarah Unnsteinsdóttir, head of social media command, to get a deeper understanding on how Icelandair uses Twitter as a marketing platform and how they perceive Icelandair consumers on Twitter. Few informal meetings were held at the early stage of this research with Hákon, where he provided the author with detailed background information about Icelandair’s operations on social media. After examining the information, Hákon and Sarah were interviewed separately, Hákon in March 2017 and Sarah a month later, in April 2017.

Even though Icelandair is an Icelandic company with the majority of its operations in Iceland, Icelandair’s content on social media is in English. That does not come as a surprise as only around 10-12% of the airline’s passengers are Icelandic (Hákon Ágústsson, project manager at Icelandair, email, February 2017).

In February 2017, Icelandair had approximately 238,000 followers on Instagram, 410,000 likes on Facebook and 107,000 followers on Twitter (Hákon Ágústsson, personal communication, January 2017).

Icelandair has been on Twitter since February 2009 and in April 2017 the airline had tweeted a little over 36,100 times, an average of 12 tweets per day. In the early days of social media, agents at the customer call center were handling enquiries on social media platforms but as these platforms grew there became a need for more personnel. Icelandair formed a social media team within its marketing department to be able to monitor and answer customer enquiries in real-time 24/7. The department is currently employing ten employees that oversee the social media operation, but the number of employers has grown in recent years, especially with increased demand (Ágústsson, 2017).

In an interview with Hákon Ágústsson in March 2017 he explained the purpose of Icelandair using Twitter as a marketing platform, stating that Icelandair uses Twitter for brand awareness as well as assisting those who are in the process of booking a trip. Sarah added:

“We are realizing how Twitter is extremely customer support related. Twitter enquiries are maybe not as high when compared to other platforms but they
are way more targeted than others. Twitter is mainly pure customer service”
(Sarah Unnsteinsdóttir, head of social media command at Icelandair)

Icelandair does not have a specific role model for its social media strategy but wants to provide the same value of service on every platform, whether the service is provided through a social media platform or through more traditional means, like through emailing. Hákón explained:

“It is quite hopeless to provide answers on Twitter in, for example, three days. It does not suit the platform. That is why we should probably try to put the same standards as we do with Twitter, to provide quick answers, that we answer emails as quickly. We do not want to stop providing answers on Twitter, or start giving bad or late answers, because we cannot answer emails fast. We are going to provide answers on Twitter as fast as people expect us to answer on Twitter but if we are not providing fast enough answers via emails than that is something that we need to fix” (Hákon Ágústsson, project manager at Icelandair).

Hákón was asked to elaborate further on this, whether he thought that the reason why users contacted Icelandair on Twitter was because they expected fast answers, he stated:

“Yes probably. On Twitter, you also find a younger group of people that are used to this platform. There are of course some companies that prioritizes Twitter and other social media, but that is, well, it might in reality be that way for us to some extent but that is not our goal. We want every platform to work as well and that everyone feels as important” (Hákon Ágústsson, project manager at Icelandair).

Icelandair uses a web-based software solution which monitors and measures the content that relates to Icelandair on various social media platforms. One measurement is the response time. According to Icelandair’s social media agent, the average response time on Icelandair’s social media platforms varies depending on the ever-changing business environment. In March 2017, the average response time for enquiries on
Facebook and Twitter was 8 minutes (Telma Björk Fjalarsdóttir, email, March 2017). Sarah added:

“Our social media team is not big so it depends on how the day is evolving. If there is a big storm that hits US for example the response time spikes. But we are managing to keep the response time around 10, 15, 20 minutes. It also depends on what time of the day it is, the US market might be waking up and all of a sudden, we have a lot of enquiries and then it spikes a bit for a while. But the response time also differs between platforms. We for example, have a longer response time on Instagram. That platform is more for engagement and we do not rush into anything with that platform, so the response time with Instagram can go up to a few hours while we try to keep it below 20 minutes with other platforms like Facebook and Twitter” (Sarah Unnsteinsdóttir, head of social media command at Icelandair).

When asked about what Icelandair considered to be the most important factor in the consumer-brand relationship for Icelandair on Twitter, Sarah said:

“I have stopped thinking that the response time is what matters the most, I of course want it to be within certain limits but it is not what matters to me, what matters is that we resolve the issue and something that we call turnover, that is, if someone is not happy when he or she initiates a conversation, then I am going to do everything I can to make him happy. I would say that now, just being present and providing answers, we have 99% customer satisfaction, even though that it might take a bit longer to resolve the issue. Sometimes the matter cannot even be resolved but just being present and providing an answer is crucial” (Sarah Unnsteinsdóttir, head of social media command at Icelandair).

Sarah was asked to compare Twitter to other social media platforms and elaborate on whether Twitter was in any way a different platform.

“Well, Twitter can spiral out of control extremely fast. Users on Twitter are different, they are a bit older, more educated, more connected, are not afraid
to tag the media for example and they expect a crystal-clear answer. You cannot allow yourself to be unclear. On Facebook for example, if there is someone that is complaining about the service, we get brand advocates that jump in and respond, saying that they disagree and the matter almost resolves itself organically. That does not happen on Twitter, the users expect an honest, and a crystal-clear, answer from the company. That is how Twitter is.” (Sarah Unnsteinsdóttir, head of social media command at Icelandair)

When Sarah was asked about where most of the enquiries on Twitter were coming from she stated:

“Most of them come from the US. That is a huge market and that is something that we keep in mind when we launch something new, whether it is a new product or what. They [the US consumers] know how to use these platforms so that I can count on quantity and a trending behavior from that particular market” (Sarah Unnsteinsdóttir, head of social media command at Icelandair).

Gaining insights into Icelandair’s social media strategy on Twitter was important since the aim of the thesis was to get a better understanding of how consumers perceive Icelandair on Twitter. Getting a deeper understanding of how Icelandair operates on Twitter when unforeseen circumstances arise, for example during a storm, was important as it can influence the communication between consumers and the brand.
5. Methodology

An in-depth phenomenological case study approach was chosen as a research design for this exploratory study. A case study approach provides a further explanation of a phenomenon for which little or no empirical data exist (Yin, 2003). According to Creswell (2012) “The case study method explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information... and reports a case description and case themes.” Case studies can either focus on a single case or multiple cases as well as numerous ways to analyze the data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case studies can include qualitative data only, quantitative data only, or a combination of both (Yin, 1984). There are no specific requirements guiding case research (Meyer, 2001), meaning that it allows tailoring the data collection procedures to the research questions. Creswell (2012) states that one aspect that characterizes a good case study is the use of many different information sources to provide depth to the case.

Since the nature of this research relied on insights from a user-centric perspective, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with ten Icelandair consumers as well as two key personnel at Icelandair. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen as a research method and applied to the interviews. IPA will be further explained in chapter 5.2.

Information can be gathered in various ways on social media platforms to gain insights from users’ perspective on the customer service provided by airlines. For this thesis, the author ran two polls on her individual Twitter page to gain insight from Twitter users. However, since the author has limited followers from outside of Iceland, the polls were published in Icelandic. First, the author wanted to know what users of Twitter thought of as their primary communication channel when they needed answers from brands. The question stated: “How would you choose to contact a company if you needed to get an answer to an enquiry?” The poll received 240 responses. Emails received 33% of the votes, followed by call centers (30%) and social media (28%) (See Appendix A).
Table 2

The primary communication channel Twitter users choose to contact brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Communication channel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Through a call center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td><strong>33%</strong></td>
<td>Through Email*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>Through social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*33% of Twitter users choose emails as their primary communication channel when they want answers from brands.

Since Twitter was the social media channel that was chosen as a subject for this case study, the author wanted to know what Twitter users considered an appropriate response time from brands. The question stated: “What do you think is an appropriate response time from brands on Twitter?” The answering options were decided based on various research (Eptica, 2016; Lithium 2013) stating that consumers want a response within an hour. The poll received 172 responses. The clear majority, or 45% of those that answered, said that an appropriate response time from brands on Twitter should be 45 minutes (See Appendix B).

Table 3

Twitter poll on average response time for brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Response time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>45%</strong></td>
<td><strong>45 minutes</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>More than 90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*45% of Twitter users believe an average of 45 minutes should be the appropriate amount of time for brands to respond to consumers on Twitter.
5.1. Qualitative methodology

Qualitative methods provide an in-depth and subjective understanding of the consumer where the researcher attempts to understand phenomena in a specific setting where the findings are not explained using statistical analysis or quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Geertz (1973) states that the value of a qualitative research design is its capacity to provide insights, rich details and thick descriptions. Quantitative methods however are based on statistical analysis where the sample size is significant enough so that the results are generalizable with quantitative research where the emphasis is on facts and causes of behavior of some sort (Charles, 1995; McDaniel & Gates, 2006). Uses and gratification research has shown that the most accurate way for individuals to provide data about their own media use are self-reports (Rubin, 2009). With that in mind, the technique used for conducting this research was semi-structured and in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviews involve interviewing respondents to explore their own views, thoughts and perspectives on specific issues or ideas (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher and the participant to have a dialogue where the questions can be modified in the light of the responses throughout the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

There are both advantages and limitations to in-depth interviews. The primary advantage is that in-depth interviews provide more and detailed information compared to other methods, such as surveys (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The aim of qualitative research methods is not to generalize the findings but rather to find meaning. The sample size in qualitative research can be determined with saturation, where the sample must be large enough so that most of the perceptions are uncovered (Mason, 2010). It is important though that the sample does not get too large so that it becomes unnecessary, when additional data collection adds little or nothing new to the research (Mason, 2010; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015). The general rule on sample size is when the same themes and topics are starting to emerge, the sufficient sample size has been reached (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

5.2. Interpretative phenomenological analysis

The nature of this research relied on insights from a user-centric perspective. Therefore, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen as a method and applied to the interviews conducted with Icelandair’s consumers. The aim of
phenomenological analysis is to explore in detail how individuals make sense of their personal and their social world (Smith, 2015). Social media, like Twitter, are a social phenomenon where individuals can have different experiences and perceptions of the same phenomena. Therefore, interpretative phenomenological analysis was considered as an appropriate method since the aim of the research was to gain a deeper understanding on how individuals are using the Twitter platform for when they are communicating with brands. The goal of a phenomenological research is not to generalize the experience but rather to provide the more insights to the experience (van Manen, 1997).

The interpretive process in IPA research is in two stages where participants first make sense of their own world and researcher then attempts to understand the participants by decoding their meaning and making sense of the participants’ meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Eisenhardt, 1989). This interpretive process is built on qualitative data, most commonly gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2008) but alternative data collection methods can also be used (i.e. diaries, focus groups, letters or chat dialogues) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Furthermore, IPA relies upon idiography as a theoretical orientation. Idiography refers to an in-depth analysis of single cases where individual perspectives are examined in their own contexts before any general statements are produced (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995).

When writing up an IPA study, the researcher transcribes the interviews and reads them through multiple times until themes start to emerge. The researcher then tries to find a connection between the emerging themes from the cases, grouping them together and writing them up one by one. Each theme is described with extracts from the interviews and followed by analytic comments from the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The interview themes will be presented in chapter six of this thesis.

5.3. In-depth interviews

The interviews were conducted from March 9th, 2017 until March 27th 2017. Since the criteria for participants were Twitter users that followed Icelandair on Twitter and had engaged with the airline on the Twitter platform, the author of this research used her own Twitter profile to connect with possible Icelandic candidates that fit the criteria. Before the interviews were conducted, the author did two pilot interviews with individuals that fit with the same criteria to see whether new questions should be added or other questions modified so that the set of questions would be coherent. Pilot interviews are a usual procedure done to test the quality of an interview protocol where they can also identify
potential research biases (Chenail, 2011). Through pilot interviews, qualitative researcher can revise their proposed research topic and gain a clearer focus on the subject at hand (Kim, 2011).

Samples within IPA research are usually homogenous (Smith & Osborn, 2008). For this case study, participants were selected through a purposive sampling approach. Since the context of the study was Icelandair users on Twitter, that had communicated with the brand on that platform, participants had to fulfill certain pre-defined criteria.

A tweet was posted where the criteria for participants was stated. The tweet received seven likes and five retweets, resulting in total of 3,723 impressions, according to Twitter activity analytics (See Appendix C). To find non-Icelandic candidates, Icelandair’s Twitter page was monitored where those that had a public Twitter account, and therefore had the option of receiving a direct message from other Twitter users, were contacted through the direct messaging option and asked if they were willing to participate. Messages were sent to possible candidates where the research was explained.

Eisenhardt (1989) states that even though there is no ideal number of cases when conducting a case study, a number between four and ten cases are usually appropriate. According to Smith & Osborn (2008) the recommended sample size of participants for IPA’s are one to fifteen participants. Since the author of this research decided on doing case study, using interpretive phenomenological analysis to analyze the data, twelve individuals were therefore chosen as participants: Ten consumers, one social media manager at Icelandair, and one project manager at Icelandair.

The Icelandair consumers that were interviewed aged from 21 to 46, five males and five females, five of whom were Icelandic and five that lived abroad. Since the vast majority of Icelandair consumers are non-Icelandic (Hákon Ágústsson, project manager at Icelandair, email, 2017) the author found it important to interview both local consumers and foreign consumers to get a more holistic view of Icelandair’s consumers and how they perceive Icelandair’s service on Twitter.
Table 4

Twitter interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Reason for contacting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User A</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Marketing representative</td>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>Bad flight experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User B</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Youth- and activism coordinator</td>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>Flight delay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User C</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Security program manager</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Terminal complaint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User D</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graphic designer</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Cancellation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User E</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Cancellation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>Booking error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User G</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Professional DJ</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Rebooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User H</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Law student</td>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>Flight delay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User I</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Digital department representative</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Online check-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User J</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Business student</td>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>Flight delay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The author relied on semi-structured interviews throughout the process. The local Icelandair consumers were met for a one-on-one interview, where the average length of an interview was approximately 45 minutes. However, Icelandair consumers that lived abroad could not, for obvious reasons, meet the author for an in-person interview. They were instead interviewed through Skype and through the private direct messaging option on Twitter. All participants were asked the same set of questions apart from the marketing managers at Icelandair, as they were asked to answer a set of questions related to Icelandair’s social media marketing strategy and their perception of consumers on social media platforms in general and consumers on Twitter.

Before each interview with the Twitter users, the researcher informed all participants that full confidentiality was guaranteed and that real names or usernames on Twitter would not be included. The one-on-one interviews and the Skype interviews
were tape recorded so that everything could be transcribed, including non-verbal behavior like pauses, sighs, laughs and so on. Like previously stated, the sample size was determined by using saturation where the author asked participants to elaborate further on specific questions to see whether new themes could emerge. Some participants were contacted again and asked to provide a more detailed answer on specific questions to reach saturation. That is, new cases were added until they offered no additional new insights and it was believed that saturation had been reached (Merriam, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Table 5

*Phases and timeframe of data gathering*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Data gathering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
<td>Informal meeting with Icelandair’s project manager. Gathering of data. Observation of Icelandair’s Twitter account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>Questionnaire for the pilot test interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>Pilot test interviews conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>Formal interview with Icelandair’s project manager Interview transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 5</td>
<td>March 2017</td>
<td>In-depth interviews with Icelandair consumers Interview transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 6</td>
<td>March 2017</td>
<td>Twitter polls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 7</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>Formal interview with head of social media command at Icelandair Interview transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 8</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>Gathering of data Clustering and write-ups of themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Interview themes

In this chapter, the author will go through the themes that emerged from the transcribed interviews. All participants explained in detail their own Twitter usage, explaining why they were on this microblogging platform, whether they thought that Twitter was in any way different from other social media platforms and whether Twitter was their primary communication channel for contacting brands. After having discussed Twitter in a broad sense, participants were asked to go thoroughly through their interactions with Icelandair on Twitter, why they used Twitter to contact the brand and how they experienced their communication with the brand. The author collected five main themes from the interviews, 1) Entertainment, 2) Creative and personal, 3) Quick and simple, 4) Service expectations, and 5) Public, with following, response content and response time being three sub-themes.

Table 6
Themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative and personal</td>
<td>Response content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick and simple</td>
<td>Response time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1. Entertainment

All ten participants stated that they used Twitter for entertainment purposes where they, as users on Twitter, mostly tweeted about funny incidences from their own lives. The majority also stated that they used Twitter as a news outlet since information often emerged faster on Twitter compared to other news websites. Entertainment and information seeking are both common within uses and gratification research as a reason for using social media (Ko et al., 2005; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). One participant said that he used Twitter for “bitching and moaning”, and while that might not be considered entertaining in a broad sense, the user himself found it to be amusing. Participants also
noticed when brands were entertaining on Twitter. Entertainment can, therefore, be seen as a critical element for the purpose of Twitter.

User B has been on Twitter since 2011. He said that he followed brands on Twitter if he found them entertaining.

“Today it is almost the only platform I use. I kind of use it for everything; planning meetings with friends, read the news and just kind of everything. [...] I follow brands on Twitter if they are doing this; being witty and participating when there is something happening. I actually find it necessary that they do so, whether it is Eurovision or the World Cup in soccer or what” (Twitter user B).

Users A, G, F all stated that they used Twitter mainly for two reasons; for personal entertainment and to keep track of live news. User H said:

“Twitter is the only platform where I have found that I have gotten to know people. Facebook is like a closed platform, where you have your mother and your grandmother and some old aunts, and you will share some pretty photos of your Sunday brunch and Instagram is maybe a bit of a glamorous social media, where everything is filtered and it projects a skewed image of the reality. Twitter is one of the few platforms where users are personal and you get the chance to get to know some people. Because it is so easy just to follow someone, that user does not necessarily have to follow you back. My view is that on Twitter people kind of make fun of themselves and emphasize what is going wrong in their lives in an entertaining way” (Twitter user H).

According to Mangold & Faulds (2009), some forms of entertainment are likely to heighten users’ interests and engagement with a brand on social media channels. Participants had a different opinion on whether Icelandair was considered entertaining on Twitter or not. User A said that even though she was following Icelandair on Twitter, she did not really notice their content in her feed and that is how she prefers it.
“I don’t think of them that much and I never see creative content from them, I see Twitter ads and I just scan through them. An airline ad is not something that I am interested in seeing on Twitter, I am not going to buy a ticket because I saw an ad there. There is nothing per se that comes to mind when I think about them on Twitter. I don’t remember a funny conversation or anything really” (Twitter user A)

User H had a similar thought, saying that she wanted brands to behave like individuals on Twitter. She did not think that Icelandair’s marketing content on Twitter was different or unique.

“I do not think that companies like Icelandair are that visible on Twitter, which is maybe how you prefer it. I see a big difference in what people think about companies on Twitter whether they are marketing themselves on Twitter kind of traditionally or if they are doing it more in a fun way. Not necessarily using standardized text with a link to an external website. I find the best brands to be the ones that behave like individual users on Twitter behave, to have the same kind of atmosphere” (Twitter user H).

Both User A and User H considered Twitter to be a platform for entertainment. They did however say that they preferred not seeing content from Icelandair in their feed, which could either suggest that the airline’s content is not entertaining enough or that the content they are usually seeing from Icelandair is promotional content. Yet, like User H mentioned, she wanted brands to be more like individuals on Twitter, meaning that brands should try to capture the same entertaining atmosphere she finds on Twitter.

6.2. Creative and personal

Most participants mentioned that brands in general should be more personal on a social media platform like Twitter. With consumers constantly expecting more from brands, creativity is becoming a vital factor (Mangolds & Faulds, 2009). This also correlates with Malone & Fiske (2013), who emphasize the importance of exhibiting humanness and warmth when companies are communicating with brands. The importance of creativity was also present in the interviews as those participants that were
pleased with their communication with Icelandair on Twitter, mentioned that responding differently on social media compared to other communication channels was important. User A, who had a bad flight experience, differentiated between social media and emails, saying that she would most likely never send Icelandair an email since to her it was too time consuming.

“I feel that when people are contacting brands on social media they are doing so on a personal note. If people do it by email, then it is so impersonal. Twitter is just handier at least. I would never send them an email I think, that is too much of a time-waster for me. I just wanted to let them know, and I am willing to give up some of my time to contact them but I am not willing to give more than 5 minutes. And exactly, I wanted a prompt response and I wanted them to give it an immediate fix” (Twitter User A).

User B had his flight cancelled because of a storm. He monitored Icelandair’s Twitter account to see if there were any updates on his flight. He immediately noticed that Icelandair was providing personal answers to those that had been affected by the storm.

“I found it very interesting to see that when I had to ask them a question on Twitter, due to a problem with my flight where it was cancelled due to bad weather, they were answering everyone that had similar questions about that flight and they were giving individual answers. Not just some standard copy/paste answers. That is what I think makes a great difference in service” (Twitter user B).

User H emphasized the fact that social media was different compared to other media, saying that showing empathy on social media was an important factor.

“I would say that the answer I got from Icelandair lived up to my expectations. When I am contacting brands on social media I expect them to kind of behave like any other user. So being sympathetic when something goes wrong or responding with a witty comment when the matter is not serious is always a nice touch. I think it is normal that brands do not use smileys or
anything like that with the more traditional media like emails, but social media are different” (Twitter user H).

This is in contrast with Leigh, Peters & Shelton (2006) who say that consumers’ interaction with brands on social media should be consistent with other brand-related interactions, for example on other platforms. User I however said that the reason for him choosing social media as a platform for customer service was because of him avoiding making calls. He brought up a recent consumer-brand interaction he had with the Dutch airline KLM on Facebook.

“I recently had an interaction with KLM where I booked a flight and received a Facebook message from them with my itinerary soon after. A few weeks later I was bumped from the flight after an equipment change and was told to call them. I’m someone who tries to avoid a call at all costs so I figured I would reply to the Facebook message and see if I could do it that way. Turns out you can. I’m almost 100% certain it was a bot based on the way response were formed. I would not mind Twitter introducing a stronger bot framework to make developing interactions like that easier and to give social marketers more time to answer the questions that require the more personal touch” (Twitter user I).

Like McKenna et al. (2002) state, some people are more comfortable with using computer mediated communication when connecting with others. This emphasizes how important it is for brands to be present on these platforms and not only rely on call centers and email communication.

6.2.1. Response content

The content of the responses was also something that users pointed out quickly in the interviews. User G is a frequent flyer with Icelandair has tagged the airline in numerous posts on Twitter. He said:

“Icelandair almost always responds to a specific question or will reply with a funny comment. For instance, I made a post when I was leaving Amsterdam airport and said "See you later alligator" ...and Icelandair responded "In A
While...crocodile”. So the person or persons managing Icelandair’s Twitter has a sense of humor, and that is nice” (Twitter user G).

User B, who had his flight delayed, said that it “made his situation better” that Icelandair responded on a personal note.

“I am very sensitive about computerized answers. They bore me, but I do understand it though if something major happens. But I feel it adds just that ‘something more’ if they give a little something extra to their answers. I once took a picture of my beer on the airport when my flight had been delayed and tagged them. They wrote back: “So sorry to hear. Have another one for us. Cheers.” Just a little something like this makes it better and more fun” (Twitter user B).

User D contacted Icelandair on Twitter to get some answers regarding a cancellation on her flight when a storm hit the US. Icelandair asked her to provide further details through direct messaging but she said that Icelandair’s response did not help her solving her issue.

“I initially had a question regarding the winter storms in New York City. The response was terrible. Icelandair was not helpful and I will never fly with them again. […] I do not feel I was serviced to the best of their ability. I did like that there was a way to contact them via Twitter, however, that did not help me in any way in the long run” (Twitter user D).

6.2.2. Following

According to Hákon, Icelandair’s project manager, one of Icelandair’s strategy on Twitter is to follow any user that has mentioned Icelandair on Twitter, whether the airline was tagged or not. The author wanted to know whether being followed back by the brand had an impact on their perception of Icelandair and whether users remembered if Icelandair was following them back or not. The users that had initially reached out to Icelandair due to some sort of a customer service related enquiry did not have an opinion on whether the airline followed them back or not. User I for example said that “it was a transactional relationship” and therefore getting a follow back from the airline was “just extra”. When asked whether Icelandair was following or not, User B said:
“I don’t know. I guess that is something that I am not thinking about. The only thing I care about is fast response. If that is not what I get, then I unfollow” (Twitter user B).

User A had to log on to Twitter and see whether the airline was following and said:

“I actually just realized that they were following me and it came to a big surprise. But then I saw how many people they are following and I thought, well okay I am not that special. But either way, I don’t understand why they are following me. But it definitely matters that they reply to me” (Twitter user A).

User H however received a follow from the airline after she tagged them in a post after seeing one of their commercials.

“Originally, they followed me. I am actually kind of proud of that. I tweeted something about an ad of theirs, tagged them and they followed me afterwards. A little later I had a flight with them and followed back because there was a delay on my flight” (Twitter user H).

User H was asked to elaborate further on this. She was asked whether it had changed her perception of Icelandair in any way to get a follow from the airline. After some thought she said:

“It might be, now when I think about it. It kind of feels like you have more positive feelings towards the brand. If I remember correctly, they liked my post and followed me afterwards, which is somehow more than just a like” (Twitter user H).

User A and User B had customer service related issues where they only wanted replies to their enquiries and it did not matter to them whether the brand was following them or not. User H however was “proud” of the fact that the brand followed her. When her flight was delayed, she decided to contact Icelandair on
Twitter since she knew that the brand was active on that platform. This indicates that even though some consumers do not mind whether a brand follows back or not, some do appreciate being acknowledged. This is in correlation with Icelandair using Twitter as a platform for brand awareness.

6.3. Quick and simple

Participants were asked if they thought Twitter was different compared to other social media platforms. All participants agreed on that Twitter differed from other platforms. The overall perception of Twitter is that it is a quick and simple platform, with few participants saying that those factors were the main reason for them using Twitter. User G believed that due to Twitter’s simplicity, brands would be more likely to respond to enquiries:

“Twitter keeps it simple. It's easy to follow and also unfollow people or brands. Also, there is a better chance of a person or brand to seeing or responding to a problem or question via Twitter” (Twitter user G).

Like previously mentioned, the maximum length of tweets is 140 characters. User I liked this feature, saying:

“I'm a fan of Twitter essentially being succinct bits of content. If I want to read more, that is an option, but I am never obligated to read more than 140 characters” (Twitter user I).

User B stated that everything happens faster on Twitter, saying:

“The main difference about Twitter compared to other social media is that everything happens much faster. I feel that it is more interactive in a way compared to the other social media platforms I use” (Twitter user B).

This is in line with what Hákon said about the essence of Twitter, where providing quick answers is key. However, one user pointed out that he did not expect an immediate answer from brands on Twitter, stating that if the matter needed an
immediate response he would contact the brand through the call center or through emailing.

“Obviously, if I as a customer have a concern that needs addressed immediately, I would call the brand or company. If my problem or question does not need an immediate response, then I will email” (Twitter user G).

User F had an opposite opinion. She initially tried to call the call center to fix a booking error but was annoyed by the wait so she turned to Twitter where the fast response time made her switch entirely to social media communication.

“I had tried to call but after having to wait on the line for 30 minutes while still being number 15 in line I gave up. I was however very happy with their service on Twitter. [...] Today, I would say that my primary platform is Facebook, with Twitter coming in second. When I realized that I could contact Icelandair through Twitter I have only used social media. Since this particular incident, I have had to deal a bit with airlines and I have seen that social media is by far the best way to communicate with them” (Twitter user F).

User F, the youngest participant, belongs to a generation that has grown up alongside the Internet. User G however, the second-oldest participant, is more used to the traditional means of communicating with brands.

6.3.1. Response time

While few of the participants were unsatisfied with how Icelandair responded to their enquiries on Twitter, all of them said that they were satisfied with the response time. Like previously mentioned, Icelandair tries to keep the response time below 20 minutes on a platform like Twitter. According to research on customer service on social media, 53% of customers expect a response to their tweet within an hour (Lithium, 2013). Additionally, the clear majority of Twitter users said that a 45-minute response time from brands on Twitter was appropriate (See Appendix A). According to this, Icelandair is well on its toes regarding response time.
User I posed a question to Icelandair on Twitter regarding the online check-in and got a response much faster than he expected to.

“The response time was minutes which is always appreciated and usually why I fall to Twitter for those types of questions, which will always make me appreciate a brand significantly more when I feel like I understand what's going on sooner. On Twitter, I would say I usually would expect a response within a couple hours just based on past experiences, with a full day being my max. I do not expect every company to be able to monitor social media 24/7 so I would say I never expect an immediate response” (Twitter user I).

User B compared the response time on Twitter with the time he assumed would pass if he would have called Icelandair’s call center.

“The response time I got was at most four to five minutes. That is probably the same amount of time that I would have had to wait for someone to pick up at the customer service call center” (Twitter user B).

User D said that Icelandair’s response was “almost immediate” yet, like previously mentioned, she was unhappy with the content of the response. Regarding the response time, she added:

“It really depends on if it is a large or small business. If it is a large business with multiple social media agents, then within 15 minutes would be a sufficient response time. Smaller businesses with fewer or one contact person take longer to respond” (Twitter user D).

User E frequently uses Twitter for customer service. He said Icelandair answered him “really quickly” and added:

“These days, brands should be able to reply to things on Twitter from customers within an hour or so, particularly if it's during business hours” (Twitter user E).
6.4. Public

Participants addressed the fact that Twitter was a public platform, stating that since it was public, companies should be more alert and response fast. However, the older participants (User C and User G) said that they did not use social media to address issues that required them to provide personal or detailed information.

User G uses three social media platforms primarily; Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Yet he differentiates between these platforms, as he only uses Twitter to contact brands.

“I do not reach out to brands via Facebook or Instagram. I keep those for friends and family. I do not look to social media for example when I am asking a question that could contain private information” (Twitter user G).

This correlates with Smith et al (2012) who found that users were willing to use Twitter to communicate with marketers. User C added on this, saying that Twitter is the only social media he uses for customer service related enquiries because of the platform being public. However, his primary communication channel is emailing.

“I've not tried to get customer support or help via any other [social media] platforms. Twitter is more public, so the cynical part of me thinks that brands are going to be more responsive, because everyone sees. [...] I use emails the most due to the ability to include lots of detail or information. Social media does not give me that, and call centers, well it is hard to talk technical to first line support folks, that is not really their strength. And convincing them to escalate can be hard” (Twitter user C).

Users G and C were the oldest out of the ten participants. While they still considered Twitter to be a customer service platform, they did not reach out to brands on Twitter when they needed to include personal information. User B pointed out the transparency of Twitter, saying that other users could take part in the conversation on Twitter and that made the platform unique.

“There is a difference between sending an email or posting something on Twitter that is public. An email is far from being transparent, it is just between
you and an individual working for the company and no one else can read what you two are talking about. If you do post something on Twitter you are making it public for others to participate” (Twitter user B).

Even though the Icelandic participants were following Icelandair on Twitter, they initially tried to call or email before reaching for assistance on Twitter. User H received an email about a 12-hour delay on her flight to Iceland. She tried to call the call center but turned to Twitter when she was met with a long wait on the other end of the line.

„I was trying to call the call center and I had to wait for a really long time, apparently, many other flights had been delayed as well, but that was when I turned to Twitter” (Twitter user H).

User F, the youngest participant, initially tried to call the call center to fix a booking error but was annoyed by the wait so she turned to Twitter.

“I had tried to call but after having to wait on the line for 30 minutes while still being number 15 in line I gave up. I was however very happy with their service on Twitter. [...] Today, I would say that my primary platform is Facebook, with Twitter coming in second. When I realized that I could contact Icelandair through direct messaging on Twitter I have only used social media. Since this particular incident, I have had to deal a bit with airlines and I have seen that social media is by far the best way to get through to them” (Twitter user F).

Participants see Twitter as a public platform and some of them were therefore reluctant to use it when they had to provide Icelandair with more detailed information or when the matters were urgent. While users G and C knew about the direct messaging option they still used other means of communication when the matters were urgent. The other American, users D, E, and I, all used Twitter frequently to connect with brands.
6.5. Service expectations

The Gaps Model of Service Quality has been widely accepted across industries as a framework to help companies find ways to deliver quality service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). According to the model, the understanding of consumer expectations is a critical factor. Consumer evaluations of service quality are influenced by consumers’ pre-service expectations. If service providers are unaware of these expectations, the service response provided might create a customer gap (Fisk, Brown & Bitner, 1993). This gap is the difference in what customers expect from brands and the subsequent perception of the service experience itself. It is important that companies try to close this gap as it could otherwise lead to negative word-of-mouth or reduced brand loyalty (Fisk et al, 1993). Participants had different opinions about Icelandair’s service on Twitter. Overall, users liked the fact that the airline provided a 24/7 service but when the service did not live up to their standards some users were disappointed. Two participants emphasized the fact that the service provided by Icelandair in general was of high standards and that is how the brand differentiates itself from others. User B said that it made everything easier to provide customer service on Twitter.

“It is not the same hassle as it was before when you needed to go and turn on data roaming on your phone to find some website and try to look up their phone number and then being met by a long wait at their customer service call center. Now you can just address them directly on Twitter and say: “This is my situation. What can I do?” (Twitter user B).

User B was asked to elaborate further on Icelandair’s customer service on Twitter. He responded:

“I find their customer service on Twitter to be outstanding. And for these times that I have had any trouble, I have contacted them via Twitter and they have responded very fast and in my opinion they have reached above and beyond to what I expected them to do” (Twitter user B).

User B later added that despite of Icelandair’s “outstanding” customer service on Twitter, he still called the company if the matter was urgent. He said:
“If I need to ask them about my flight ticket or a connection flight, I call them. But if I need information about partner affiliations I use Twitter” (Twitter user B).

User A mentioned that Icelandair differentiates themselves from their competitors with good service. Knowing this beforehand made her experience with Icelandair on Twitter a disappointment since her perception of their communication was poor.

“I know that they are all about their outstanding service and that is what they differentiate themselves from the competitors then I would have liked a sincerer, more of a “we want to hear from you” kind of a response. But that is only since this is how they differentiate themselves from others, to give the best service, you pay a little bit more to get the best service. I would have liked to have seen the service to be a bit more coherent throughout. Everything went so smoothly in the booking, everything was great, but during the flight, and I know these things happen and it wasn’t a big thing for me and I just wanted to let them know about it, especially because it was my second flight in this month that this was happening. But it does not change my opinion about the company that much, I have flown with them again since then” (Twitter user A).

Asked to elaborate further on why her purchasing behavior did not change, she said:

“Well it is a local airline, there are of course not so many airlines that fly through Iceland. If it would have been another service, like I don’t know, maybe the fast food industry, I might have switched to something else” (Twitter user A).

Even though this experience eventually did not affect her purchasing behavior, this created a customer gap since the consumers’ expectations were not met. This correlates with Fisk et al. (1993) where, if it would have been another service, the loyalty towards the brand would have been affected. Another research showed that dissatisfaction with a single transaction will not necessarily lead to lasting customer dissatisfaction or eventual defection (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha & Bryant, 1996).
User J had some expectations when she initiated a conversation with Icelandair on Twitter but said that she did not really know what to expect. Being directed off the platform threw her off.

“I have heard so much that Icelandair is all about service. And I also knew that they had a good reputation on Twitter so I kind of expected more. It was not a bad response, I was not hurt or anything, but since they had such a good reputation. I don’t know, I maybe just wanted to get into a conversation with a person on Twitter about like what happened. Not to be directed to a URL. For me it was very non-personal and very computerized” (Twitter user J)

This is in line with what Jeff Lesser (2017) at Twitter pointed out, that resolving the issue in-channel is vital for brands. Participants perceive Icelandair as a high quality brand and therefore expect the company to provide the same standard of service. Like User A mentioned, finding another airline brand in Iceland might not be as easy as finding a new fast food chain. However, not meeting expectations can easily effect customer satisfaction.
7. Discussion

The participants were overall pleased with the service Icelandair provided on Twitter. Despite having different reasons for why they contacted Icelandair, they shared the similar views on what attributes brands like Icelandair should have when responding to consumers on Twitter. The participants that got a personal and a sympathetic response were satisfied with the service and seemed to understand the issue better than those that got a computerized response, as described by them. The same participants stated that the response time was fairly quick, yet they were more pleased with that their matters could be solved on the platform. It can therefore be drawn from the interviews that consumers prioritize the response content over response time, which also correlates with what Icelandair’s head of social media command said when she stated that resolving the issue was what mattered the most.

All of the participants used Twitter mainly for entertainment purposes, which is in line with uses & gratification research, where entertainment is a common reason for why people use social media (Alhabash & McAlister, 2014; Ko et al., 2005; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Two participants specifically remembered when Icelandair responded to them in a fun way. Furthermore, both of them were satisfied with Icelandair’s service on Twitter. This supports that entertaining content can increase users’ interest and engagement with brands on social media in relations with brands (Mangolds & Faulds, 2009). However, some participants did not think that Icelandair’s content was something they wanted to see in their feed as they considered their content to be promotional and that was something they were not interested in.

Participants’ perception of Twitter indicates that information emerges faster on this platform compared to other social media. One participant (User A) said that emails were too time consuming for her, she wanted a “prompt response”, which was something she got on Twitter. According to Håkon, Icelandair does not prioritize any communication channel. However, participants experience the response time on the more traditional channels to be slower compared to social media. That also correlates with Eptica (2016), stating that Twitter and Facebook have become more accurate and faster than email. It can therefore be argued that a richer emphasis on social media could have a positive impact on Icelandair’s customer satisfaction.

Participants were fairly neutral regarding whether or not Icelandair followed them back on Twitter. One participant said that she was proud of the fact that Icelandair followed her, saying that she had “positive feelings towards the brand” “after being
followed. It can therefore be argued that even though participants said that they did not mind whether Icelandair followed or not, this strategy will not harm the consumer-brand relationship.

Participants also addressed the fact that Twitter was a public platform. While all participants used Twitter to connect with Icelandair, only few of them used it to resolve urgent matters that required them to provide detailed or personal information using the direct messaging option. The older participants preferred using the more traditional communication channels when contacting brands despite having social media accounts. The Icelandic participants were less aware of the fact that matters could be resolved on Twitter and therefore tried calling or emailing first. However, most of them were pleased with the service provided on Twitter, with one participant stating that she only used social media after she realized that was an option.
8. Conclusion

The aim of this exploratory case study was to examine what motivated Icelandair’s consumers on Twitter to seek information on that platform. For this case study research, the author relied on interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore how and why Icelandair consumers utilize Twitter as a platform to communicate with the airline. The motivations for using Twitter as a social media were also compared with uses and gratification research to further explain the motives for individuals using Twitter as a social media. Two research questions were addressed:

1) What are the benefits for airline brands of communicating with Twitter users?
2) How does Twitter affect an airline brands quality of service?

To answer the first research question the author asked participants to describe what they thought of Twitter, how they were using it and what they wanted to see from brands on this platform. Twitter is a public platform where consumers can burst out their opinions about a product or a service at any given time of the day. The platform is growing steadily (Statista, 2017), meaning that brands have the opportunity to reach a larger group of audience. Therefore, knowing how to respond to consumers on this platform is vital to prevent negative eWOM from becoming viral. The right response could on the other hand result in positive eWOM, having an impact on brand image and brand awareness (Tripp & Grégoire, 2011). The second research question asked how Twitter affected an airline brands quality of service. Brands can provide consumers with answers in a short amount of time on Twitter. This is especially important for airlines as air travel is a sensitive industry and consumers are often counting on airlines to provide them with information as fast as possible. Consumers have high expectations towards brands like Icelandair and, according to participants, Icelandair is meeting these expectations when the right information is provided within a limited amount of time.

The findings from the in-depth interviews give a deeper and a more comprehensive understanding of why consumers interact with brands on Twitter and what they value in this communication. These findings can give businesses useful information on how to communicate with users on social media platforms, both in terms of existing and potential customers. This study adds to the knowledge on how companies within a service related industry, such as the airline industry, can benefit from getting an in-depth feedback from consumers.
Companies that are competing in a competitive business environment need to listen to consumer preferences and use the information to help them to drive their future marketing strategies. The vast technological changes in recent years have impacted various sectors, including the travel sector. Companies can no longer solely focus on promoting their brand; now they need to know they are performing for an audience (Parmar, 2015). Emailing is still one of the primary ways that consumers use to contact brands (Bluecore, 2016), which is in line with the results from the Twitter poll (See Appendix A). However, research suggests that the email channel is becoming less accurate and slower (Eptica, 2016), with one participant saying that emailing was “too much of a time-waster”.

Social media have brought to light new channels for brands and consumers to communicate and customer service is now one of the main reasons consumers follow brands on Twitter (Elrhoul, 2015). Consumers no longer want companies to speak to them, they want companies to listen and engage in a conversation with them (Kietzman et al, 2011). With a whole generation of consumers growing up alongside the Internet and social media, the traditional means for communicating with brands might become outdated in the near future. With participants emphasizing the convenience, speed and simplicity of Twitter indicates that there are more opportunities that lie ahead. Understanding how consumers are communicating with brands on social media and what they value in this communication will benefit companies as they can manage their platforms more effectively. With 89% of companies saying that customer service is a way of differentiation (Straehle, Roth & Herr, 2015), listening to what consumers value on social media is key as it can both have an impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.
8.1. Managerial implications

The findings from this research indicate that Icelandair is doing well on Twitter. With a team of ten employees, they are monitoring a tremendous amount of enquiries from customers and providing them with appropriate answers. However, with consumers’ high expectations of service from Icelandair, as well as wanting personalized responses within a limited amount of time, it can be argued that Icelandair should strengthen its social media team, especially since solving matters quickly and in-channel is vital.

Furthermore, the findings suggested that different and creative content was something that participants appreciated, as well as humor and witty responses. Icelandair should consider placing more emphasis on entertainment, both regarding its marketing content and its responses to consumers.

Icelandic consumers are less aware of the fact that Icelandair can provide customer support through private messaging and consumers are therefore reluctant to use the platform. Activating these consumers that are already on the Twitter platform will have an overall benefit for Icelandair. The consumers that can have their matters solved on social media will as a result not seek assistance through the more traditional communication channels, reducing the response time for those who do prefer calling or emailing.

8.2. Limitations and further research

The interpretive phenomenological analysis provided useful insights from the consumers’ perspectives. However, the purposive sample in this case study is not generalizable and therefore may not represent a large population. Additionally, this study only focuses on consumers within the airline industry and one airline in particular, Icelandair. Future research could consider consumers within other industries that rely heavily on service, for example industries such as insurance, hotels, banking or telecommunication.

Furthermore, this study only included participants that used Twitter to contact Icelandair. And as presented by Smith et al (2012), social media channels provide different social media communication. Future research could examine how consumers use multiple channels to contact brands. Another interesting opportunity for future research is to find users that have completely shifted from traditional customer service platforms, emails or call centers, to social media platforms only.
The participants of the in-depth interviews were coincidentally of two nationalities; Icelandic and American. Yet this is in line with Icelandair’s consumers on Twitter, most of them are from the US. For future research, consumers of more nationalities would be beneficial as to see if there is a difference between geographical locations regarding the use of different communication channels.
9. References


Bumgarner, B. A. (2007). You have been poked: Exploring the uses and gratifications of Facebook among emerging adults. First Monday, 12(11).


Chenail, R. J. (2011). Interviewing the investigator: Strategies for addressing instrumentation and researcher bias concerns in qualitative research. The Qualitative Report, 16(1), 255.


Oremus, W. (2015). Twitter is trading the “favorite” for the “like”. It’s about time. Retrieved on March 5th from http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2015/11/03/twitter_favorite_button_is_now_the_like_button_and_the_star_is_a_heart.html


Appendix A

Hvernig myndir þú kjósa að hafa samband við fyrirtæki ef þú þyrftir að fá svar við fyrirspurn?

- 30% Hringja í þjónustuver
- 33% Senda tölvupóst
- 28% Í gegnum samfélagamiðla
- 9% Annað

240 votes • Final results
Appendix B

Hvað telur þú að sé þasættanlegur svartími fyrirspurna til fyrrirtækja á Twitter?

- 8% 5 mínútur
- 45% 45 mínútur
- 28% 90 mínútur
- 19% Meira en 90 mínútur

172 votes • Final results
Appendix C

Tweet Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impressions</td>
<td>3,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total engagements</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media engagements</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail expands</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile clicks</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link clicks</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweets</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Tyler Bridges @Tyler_Bridges · Apr 10
@united @FoxNews @CNN not a good way to treat a Doctor trying to get to work because they overbooked