

# **Analysis of Cruising 2.0 with a Focus on Social Networks**

## **Bachelorarbeit**

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Motivation, Relevance and Objective of the Research Question**

Through the increasing distribution of the Internet, new opportunities for suppliers of products and services are provided. Constantly, new communication channels get developed which could be used by companies for advertisement, disposal and support. A survey in 2013 by the German market research enterprise TNS Infratest shows that already 76.5% of the German population over 14 years uses the Internet (cf. TNS Infratest 2013, pp. 17-20). Whereby, also more and more households in Germany get connected to the broadband Internet. According to the study of Eurostat (2013) in 2012 broadband Internet was already available for 82% of the households in Germany (cf. Eurostat 2013). Through the rising participation, acceptance and excitement of the population the Internet developed to the “Web 2.0”. Once content in the Internet was only provided one-sided from large providers, like manufacturers who published product information or vendors who published catalogues of goods for sale. Today’s Internet users also developed to providers of contents. For example, through the participation in miscellaneous social media applications, like blogs, social network services, forums, free Internet encyclopedias (wikis), podcasts, media sharing, rating and information portals the Internet user becomes a creator of “User-generated Content“. A study of the German Bundesverband Informationswirtschaft, Telekommunikation und neue Medien e.V. (BITKOM) shows that Internet users are averagely registered in at least 2 social network services (cf. BITKOM 2011, p. 6).

This development also influences the tourism industry. Since 2005 the share of tourists that book their travels in a travel agency has sunk by 10%, from 44% to 34%, and the share for Internet portals has more than doubled, from 7% to 15% (cf. RA 2013, p. 4). Thereby, tourists can gather more and more information, reviews and rating from the Internet which may affect their travel decision.

Within the tourism industry the cruise sector represents a very stable and rising sector. The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) recognized for its member cruise lines an average annual passenger growth rate of 7.2% since 1980 and cruise ships are booked out above 100% (cf. CLIA 2013, p 5).

Because of the large participation in social network services the study in this paper will be an examination of 3 specific cruise lines in 2 different social network services. The specific cruise lines are the Royal Caribbean International cruise lines, AIDA Cruises and the Norwegian Cruise Line. Thereby, the search for possible contact points in social network services where prospective customers could gather information about a specific cruise line in their information process, before the travel decision is made, will be the focus of this study.

## **1.2. Method and Structure of the Study**

To find possible contact points where prospective customers could gather information about a specific cruise line, the 2 social network services Facebook<sup>1</sup> and Google+<sup>2</sup> will be analyzed for each cruise line.

In the following chapter, chapter 2, the theoretical principles about the Web 2.0, social network services and the tourism industry will be presented. During the study in chapter 3, the social network services and companies will be introduced and possible contact points will be indentified, analyzed and presented. Based on the achieved results, these will be discussed in chapter 4. Thereby, the identified possibilities for a company will be considered and, based on identified advantages and disadvantages, recommendations for the cruise lines will be provided. After a critical appraisal of the realized research method in chapter 4, in chapter 5 a summary and outlook will be presented.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/> (Last viewed 07.08.2013)

<sup>2</sup> <https://plus.google.com/> (Last viewed 07.08.2013)

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1. Summary**

In the presented study the social network services Facebook and Google+ have been analyzed for the 3 cruise lines Royal Caribbean International, AIDA Cruises and the Norwegian Cruise Line. The analysis was realized to find possible contact points for prospective customers where they could gather information about these cruise lines.

The analysis based on the facts that nearly everybody participates in social network services and that customers trust the most in recommendations from acquaintances. Despite that only a minority of tourists use social network services to get information from other users for their holiday planning. Therefore, it was necessary to search in social network services if there even are possible contact points for prospective customers where they could gather information about their holiday planning, more specifically, about the specific cruise lines.

Through the study there were found the search for apps, a keyword search with hashtags and the search for pages and groups or communities in Facebook and Google+ as possible contact points. At this, for all 3 companies there were found specific apps. Also every company runs a main page in Facebook and Google+. Thereby, the Royal Caribbean International cruise line and the Norwegian Cruise Line have the strategy in Facebook to run a variety of pages in different native languages. AIDA Cruises only runs one main page in German. In Google+ only AIDA Cruises moderates an own community, probably because in Google+ users can not start new posts on a company's page. On a Google+ page users can just comment existing posts of the page moderator.

Overall, the 3 cruise lines already were very present in both social network services but obviously Google+ was less busy.

From these findings advantages and disadvantages of different occurred strategies and characteristics in Facebook and Google+ have been derived and recommendations for the companies' behaviors were formulated.

### **6.2. Outlook**

For the future it remains to be seen if Google+ will establish itself in the population. It could happen that a comparable progress, as the user migration from studiVZ to Facebook, will also occur in the direction of Google+. But Google+ also could flop, since

the success of Google+ can't be estimated yet. Therefore it is important not to neglect this social network service. Otherwise, it could be possible that competitors dominate this platform through earlier or higher engagement.

The 3 regarded cruise lines already run their own pages in Google+, but an additional community should be created by the Royal Caribbean International cruise line and by the Norwegian Cruise Line.

AIDA Cruises only offers German pages and groups in Facebook and Google+ and should consider providing an English page for information and support for a higher range.

Apart from that, in Facebook the companies all run a very active main page and seem to be well prepared for the future in social media marketing. Further recommendations than derived from this study could be made after a complete evaluation of the posts and comments on the pages and in the groups/communities.