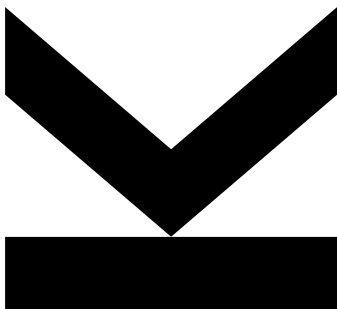


KEY SUCCESS AND COMPETITIVE FACTORS OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ANALYZED THROUGH THE LENS OF STRATEGIC CHOICE AND DETERMINISM



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Statutory Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted is my own unaided work, that I have not used other than the sources indicated, and that all direct and indirect sources are acknowledged as references.

This printed thesis is identical with the electronic version submitted.

Linz, November 2019

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List of Abbreviations

CAb	<i>corporate ability</i>
CABS	Chartered Association of Business Schools
CSR	.....	<i>Corporate Social Responsibility</i>
EBSCO	.....	Elton Bryson Stephens Company
etc.	.....	and other similar things, and so forth
FB	.....	<i>Facebook</i>
FMCG	.....	<i>Fast Moving Consumer Goods</i>
HR	.....	<i>Human Resources</i>
i.e.	.....	<i>id est (that is; in other words)</i>
JSTOR	.....	Journal STORage
KPIs	.....	<i>Key Performance Indicators</i>
M&A	.....	Mergers & Acquisitions
PESTEL	.....	<i>political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, environmental, legal</i>
R&D	.....	<i>Research and Development</i>
RoI	.....	<i>Return on Investment</i>
SAGE	.....	Sara Miller McCune, George D. McCune
SWOT	.....	<i>strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats</i>
VHB	.....	Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft e.V

1. Executive Summary

Corporate communication has always been a deciding factor for corporate success as it represents organizations' central function for interacting with key stakeholders such as customers, shareholders, employees and members of the society (Long & Hazelton, 1987; van Riel & Blackburn, 1995). However, since the beginning of the 21st century and the rise of the internet as well as social media, corporate communication has become one of the key competitive differentiators for corporations worldwide, offering unprecedented potential in terms of exposure to and contact with stakeholders through high-speed, large-scale and high volume information diffusion possibilities (e.g. Adams & Frost, 2006; Capriotti, 2011; Ki & Hon, 2006; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010). The importance of corporate communication as a strategic management function has thus led to the creation and execution of a multitude of corporate communication strategies targeting distinct stakeholders, featuring different types of contents and pursuing various objectives (e.g. Argenti, 1996; Christensen, Morsing, & Cheney, 2008; Grunig, 1992; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Moss & Warnaby, 1998; Steyn, 2004).

The concepts of strategic choice and determinism have represented a source of academic debate since the beginning of scholarly research within the fields of strategic management and organizational science (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Child, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985). On the one hand, strategic choice views managerial action as the primary source of power behind organizational decisions and, on the other, determinism regards the environment and internal structures of organizations as limiting human latitude for actions, thus placing events originating from outside management-related spheres of influence at the primary position for influencing any type of organizational behavior (e.g. Aldrich, 1979; Child, 1972; Whittington, 1988).

This Master's Thesis' main assumption is that corporate communication strategies vary depending on whether corporations show high levels of strategic choice or determinism. In order to thoroughly evaluate this assumption, both fields of research are initially reviewed individually in order to then establish a mutual empirical framework for conducting research on the matter. As a result of this thesis' research, hypotheses concerning the above-stated assumption are generated.

The first part of this Master's Thesis reviews high-quality literature on the concepts of strategic choice versus determinism and the field of corporate communication. Regarding the latter topic, the corporate communication function is regarded as being part of the functional level of

strategy within organizations (Steyn, 2004). Furthermore, three different main typologies containing a total of eight sub-typologies of corporate communication strategies are proposed (e.g., Argenti, 1996; Christensen, Morsing, & Cheney, 2008; Grunig, 1992; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Moss & Warnaby, 1998; Steyn, 2004): Stakeholder-based communication strategy (consisting of internal and external communication strategies); Content-based corporate communication strategy (classified into expertise, image and hybrid communication strategies); Objective-based corporate communication strategy (composed of informational, persuasive and involvement communication strategies). Concerning the concept of strategic choice versus determinism, it is assumed that each organization is placed at a particular location on a continuum between full strategic choice and maximum determinism depending on a variety of relevant organizational and environmental factors (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985). In this context, the two contrasting but intertwined concepts are separately taken into account from micro and macro perspectives (e.g. Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Drazin & van Ven, 1985; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006; Miles & Snow, 1984). The literature review concludes with the establishment of two frameworks which are based on both reviewed fields of research, strategic choice versus determinism and corporate communication, respectively. These frameworks firstly constitute summaries of the most important generated insights within the literature review and, secondly, the theoretical structures upon which the research methodology of this thesis' empirical part is built.

For the purpose of assessing the main assumption of this Master's Thesis and answering its related research questions, digital communication channels consisting of corporate websites and selected social media profiles of 25 of the 500 highest-grossing Austrian companies were analyzed in the empirical part of this thesis using methods derived from content analysis. In this regard, the employed research methodology is solely based on insights gathered from the literature review of this thesis. Consequently, the research results were firstly categorized according to predefined divisions and indicators of corporate communication strategies and, secondly, these results were further classified based on the selected companies' positions on the established strategic choice and determinism continuum. In total, the conducted research consisted of a comprehensive analysis of 112 corporate social media profiles and websites containing 813 coding units (i.e., social media posts and corporate website elements), which were further analyzed on the basis of 3324 identified indicators. A correlation analysis of the results did indicate enough significance in order to generate several hypotheses in favor of this Master's Thesis' main assumption and consequently answer all stipulated research questions. In short, findings indicate that companies with high levels of strategic choice prefer image-based, informational and multi-stakeholder targeted communication strategies compared to deterministic companies, which are more likely to employ customer-focused, expertise-based

and persuasive communication strategies. Notwithstanding the inherent limitations of this Master's Thesis, implications for both academia and practitioners were discovered and potential for further research was found.

2. Introduction

2.1. Problem Statement

The appearance of the World Wide Web in 1993 did not only signal the beginning of a new age of information but also introduced a new digital competitive dimension for corporations worldwide, which, in turn, signaled the birth of digital communication strategies (Leiner, B., Cerf, V., Clark, D., Kahn, R., Kleinrock, L., Lynch, D., Roberts, L., and Wolff, S., 1997). While this was not as obvious back then, ever since the massive worldwide rise in internet adoption of the early 2000s and, at the very latest since the introduction of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn or Youtube, there has been no doubt about the massive competitive impact as well as stakeholder implications of digital corporate communication strategies (Colleoni, 2013; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010). This development has not only completely changed the relationship between different organizations both from a competitive point of view as well as concerning the stakeholder environment, but it has also introduced several advantages and disadvantages for all involved parties. Some of the advantages are that companies may reach more diverse target groups in a more accurate way with higher amounts of information, while stakeholders have direct access to both a higher quality and quantity of data than ever (Adams & Frost, 2006). However, disadvantages are represented by the either unregulated or overregulated nature of online information flow (Adams & Frost, 2006; Yang, 2016), leading to the excessive presence of low-quality information that may pose multiple risks (Adams & Frost, 2006; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Chesney & Citron, 2018).

Digital communication strategies are powerful tools of public relations and therefore represent an essential part of an organization's general corporate communication strategy (Ki & Hon, 2006). The purpose of corporate communication strategies is the transmission of relevant strategic issues to various internal and external stakeholders and is, in turn, part of an organization's functional strategy (Steyn, 2004). And, together with other functional departments (e.g., marketing, finance or operations) which constitute an organization's entire functional strategy, it represents the third level of organizational strategy which is derived from the second level, the business strategy, which, in turn, is based on the highest level of organizational strategy, the corporate strategy (Vancil & Lorange, 1975). Strategic management defines the above-mentioned organizational strategy across all its levels with the goal of carrying out activities that strive to successfully compete in a given environment using concepts such as competitive business strategies (Porter, 1985), resource-based strategies (Barney, 1991), corporate diversification strategies (Rumelt, 1982), strategic mixes (Thiéart, 2005), cooperative strategies (Chen & Miller, 2015), market- or product-based strategies

(Ansoff, 1957) and many more. The basic prerequisite of these and most other concepts of strategic management and its theoretical framework rests on the assumption of complete strategic choice, which denotes the ability of a given organization to choose and carry out its intended actions as it wishes, regardless of possibly limiting factors resulting from organizational, environmental, legal, political or any other contextual circumstances (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1972, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978; Whittington, 1988). This widely accepted condition has been challenged mainly by suggesting the existence of another state of freedom of action and decision named determinism, which stands in total contrast to strategic choice and denominates a situation where an organization is environmentally and contextually limited in planning and exercising its actions (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Child, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Whittington, 1988). Strategic choice and determinism can be understood as two ends on the same continuum and an organization's exact placement on it is dependent on both internal company-related and external environmentally-linked variables (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Child, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Whittington, 1988). This, in turn, implies that strategies, both on the formulation and execution side, fundamentally differ based on how much the respective organization is affected by either being in a situation of strategic choice or determinism. To get back to the main point of this introduction, this Master's Thesis assumes that corporations' digital communication strategies and their peculiarities including objectives, content, channels and targeted stakeholder groups significantly differ based on the respective corporations' positions on the strategic choice - determinism continuum.

2.2. Purpose of the Master's Thesis

This Master's Thesis is dedicated to analyzing and understanding patterns of digital communication strategies from the perspective of strategic choice versus determinism. For this reason, the main focus of this thesis is twofold: Firstly, emphasis is put on reviewing high-quality literature on the topic of corporate communication and the concepts of strategic choice and determinism with the goal of establishing theoretical linkages between the two relatively unrelated fields of research. Secondly, the empirical part is dedicated to formulating an appropriate research methodology based on the reviewed insights in order to then summarize, analyze and categorize relevant existing data from the chosen corporations' digital communication channels. Consequently, the main objective of this Master's Thesis is to identify relevant correlations between its research results for the purpose of establishing clear hypotheses supporting this thesis' main assumption and answering its specified research questions. In effect, this Master's Thesis should serve as both a comprehensive collection and critical analysis of the most relevant characteristics of current digital communication strategies

observed and explained through the theories of strategic choice and determinism. Furthermore, this thesis strives to represent a profound exploratory study attempting to both theoretically and practically combine two largely disconnected fields of research. Depending on the significance of this thesis' results, this may result in the identification of research gaps and thus provide potential for further research. In this regard, the discovery of implications for practitioners as well as academics is also part of this Master Thesis' purpose.

2.3. Research Questions

The following research questions are essential to further investigating the validity of this Master's Thesis' main assumption and to subsequently establish hypotheses supporting this thesis' standpoints.

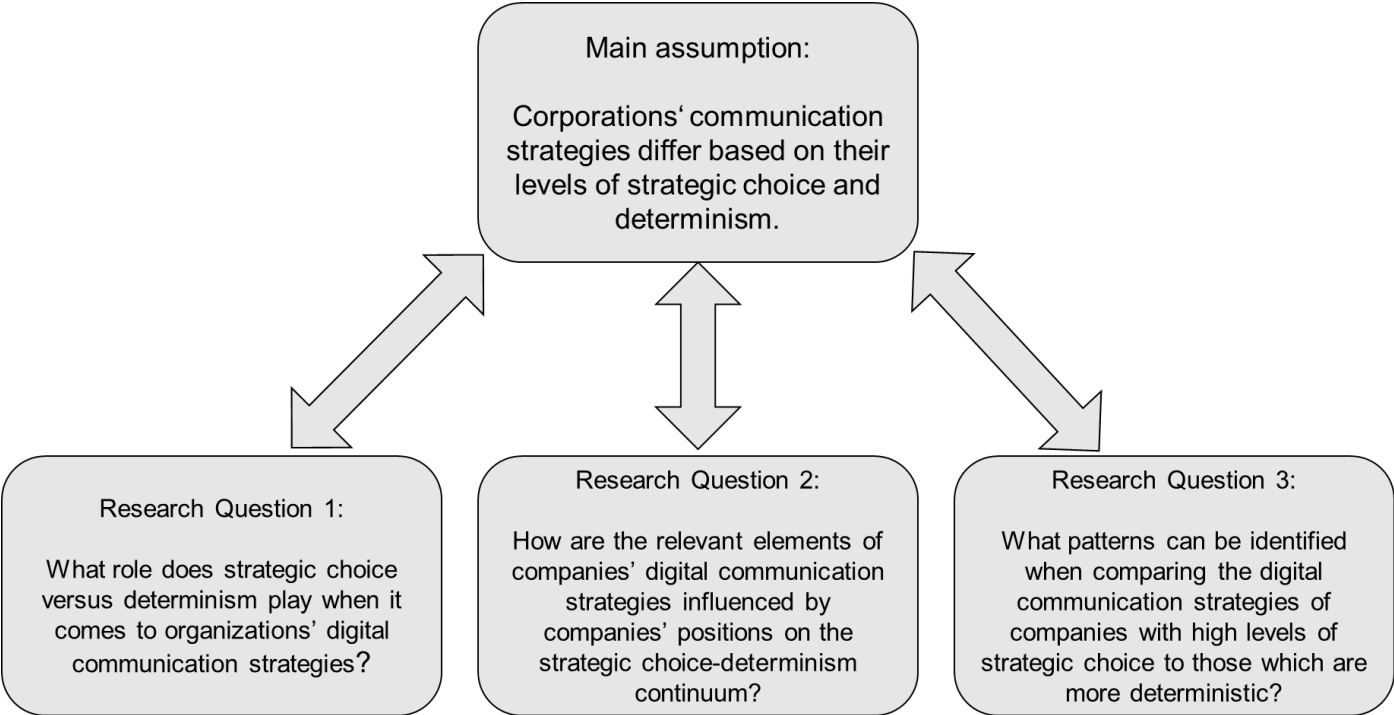


Figure 1: Main assumption and research questions

The theoretical foundation for this thesis' aptitude to accurately examine the research questions stated above is represented by the literature review while the methods used to solve the concrete issues resulting from these questions are documented in the empirical part of this thesis. The detailed answers to the research questions are presented and further elaborated upon in the chapter "Discussion".

2.4. Delimitation

This Master's Thesis investigates representations of digital communication in the form of corporate websites as well as company profiles on the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. Within this context, design and content-related features as well as considerations with regards to objectives and targeted stakeholders of digital communication strategies are analyzed and evaluated solely in terms of freely available and accessible social media KPIs such as followers, likes and others (Baym, 2013). Translations of these social media KPIs into traditional financial, customer and other commonly used business-related KPIs such as ROI, market share or customer satisfaction (Tsai & Cheng, 2012; Yuan, Zeng, Skibniewski, & Li, 2009) are not within the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, representations of strategic choice and determinism are evaluated solely on the basis of the chosen representations of digital corporate communication via the methodology outlined in the appropriate chapter. Any interpretations of actual business-related performances of the analyzed companies are not within the scope of this thesis. Finally, it should be noted that results are based on observations of companies' digital representations and that the process of observation is based on the concept of theory-laden objectivism (Marshall, 1981). Finally, the theoretical framework which acts a basis for this thesis' empirical part is solely represented by the reviewed literature and no other scholarly works outside of the chosen portfolio were taken into consideration.

2.5. Outline of the Thesis

This Master's Thesis is divided into 5 main chapters. The first chapter represents the executive summary. This sub-chapter signals the end of the second chapter, the introductory chapter. The third chapter consists of the literature review and provides a detailed overview and evaluation of this thesis' theoretical framework which consists of academic literature about corporate communication strategies as well as strategic choice versus determinism. The theoretical part of this thesis, therefore, acts as the scientific foundation for the subsequent empirical part. Chapter four, "Research Design and Methodology" deals with the definition of the empirical process detailing the exact methods and criteria employed for conducting this Master Thesis' research. After the execution of this thesis' empirical part, the fifth chapter, "Results", categorizes, illustrates and elaborates upon relevant findings from the conducted content analysis. The sixth chapter, "Discussion", analyzes and explores the previously stated results in greater detail: Hypotheses are generated, linkages to existing literature is investigated, limitations are stated, academic and practical implications are specified and potential for further research is examined. Chapter number seven represents the end of this Master's Thesis and provides the final conclusion.

3. Literature Review

This chapter reviews and summarizes selected literature which represents this thesis' theoretical framework following the concept of a traditional "literature review" in academic management and business research (Fisch & Block, 2018). Although there is no universally accepted definition of a literature review, it is generally agreed upon that the purpose of a literature review consists of outlining and evaluating the accumulated knowledge on a specific academic topic (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).

According to Webster and Watson (2002, p. iii), the exact scope, elaborateness and objectives of a literature review are dependent on the level of maturity of the research topic and whether or not it is connected to any emerging issues. Following this argumentation, the literature review of this Master's Thesis represents the intellectual state of affairs of the two strategic management-related fields and concepts of "corporate (digital) communication strategies" and "strategic choice versus determinism". And, as this Master's Thesis is composed of both a theoretical and empirical part, the literature review serves as the contextual foundation of the subsequent empirical part.

The next chapter details the literature review approach and provides a precise outline of the selected literature.

3.1. Review Approach and Literature Selection

For the purpose of this literature review, sources of information including high-quality and peer-reviewed journal articles and selected books have been selected and analyzed.

The databases which were used to find relevant literature were EBSCOhost (i.e., Business Source Premier), Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, JSTOR, SAGE Journals, SpringerLink, Web of Science and Wiley Online Library.

Search queries were based on the denomination of this thesis' topics as well as related synonyms and hyponyms. That is to say, search queries in the above-mentioned literature databases and search engines included the following keywords in different combinations and using a variety of syntax inputs: corporate communication strategy, digital, social media, website, strategic choice, determinism as well as related synonyms and hyponyms. Additionally, after finding suitable sources originating from the above search queries, further sources were identified using backward citation search on the already selected literature.

Furthermore, this Master's Thesis has been equipped with the following quality threshold: Journal articles with a rating of "B" or higher following the journal rating of the German Academic Association for Business Research (VHB) "Jourqual 3" and/or a rating of "3" or higher following the journal rating of the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) "Academic Journal Guide 2018" were kept in the base sample. Exceptions to this quality threshold were made regarding selected key sources which contain either foundational or innovative insights relevant to this thesis' theoretical framework. Therefore, select few sources cited within the literature review of this thesis are not listed in any high-quality journal. However, in these exceptional cases, special attention was given to only include literature from authors that are particularly established in their respective fields. Furthermore, literature used to illustrate specific concepts, facts and figures in the introductory or empirical part of this paper were also not rated according to the above method. Barring one exceptional source written in German, all cited sources used in the literature review are composed in English. Because of this thesis' reliance on established theories from the field of corporate communication as well as strategic management and organizational science, no boundaries regarding the dates of publication of sources covering the above-mentioned academic topics have been set. Exceptions include sources on topics such as digital communication strategies and social media: In this context, no literature older than 2006 has been selected, as it is the year of publication of this thesis' most relevant journal article dealing with digital communication (Adams & Frost, 2006) and thus any sources from before the year of 2006 on these particular topics were considered outdated.

The total number of used sources is 108. These 108 sources are composed of 90 peer-reviewed journal articles and 13 high-quality books and/or book chapters, 4 articles from professional journals or specialized internet sources and 1 piece of gray literature. The sources are listed in the chapter "Bibliography". These sources are implemented into the following literature review, the preceding introductory chapters and the empirical part of the thesis.

The next chapter commences the official literature review of this Master's Thesis and reviews literature on corporate communication.

3.2. Corporate Communication

One definition of corporate communication by van Riel and Blackburn (1995, p. 24), which was one of the earliest scholarly books on the subject (Balmer, 2009), reads as follows: "The integrated approach to all communication produced by an organization, directed at relevant target groups". Furthermore, Christensen et al. (2008, p. 3) define corporate communication as one perspective which unites "everything the organizations says or does in a unitary and consistent manner" and thus makes it possible for organizations to "project a coherent and unambiguous image of what the organization is and stands for". As a concept which is related to the field of corporate communication, public relations is defined by Long and Hazelton (1987, p. 6) as "a communication function of management through which organizations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals". Because of their conceptual similarities and, in order to resolve any common misconceptions regarding the definition of the above concepts, Steyn (2004) argues that there are no theoretical differences between the concept of "public relations" and "corporate communication". This understanding is adopted and utilized for the remainder of this Master's Thesis.

Since the inception of the term in academic management sciences, a multitude of different definitions and descriptions have surfaced, however, the main function of corporate communication within organizations consists of connecting, interacting and building or maintaining relationships with internal and external stakeholders in different ways and using different means and methods of communication (Cornelissen, 2014). As a result of the above function, the final goal of corporate communication is to influence all relevant stakeholder groups of an organization in such a manner that they act favorably towards the organization's objectives. Consequently, effective corporate communication increases the market performance of the respective organization's product or service offering because of the way customers, shareholders and other stakeholders perceive and react to the company's actions while, at the same time, shielding the organization from and reducing the risk of reputational damage caused by possible inefficiencies or errors, which would obviously have negative effects on the organizational performance (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 54).

The next chapter focuses on the strategic aspects of corporate communication, discussing its historical and academic development and its correlations with the field of strategic management. Furthermore, its conceptualization and the resulting intricacies as a strategic management function are explored. Finally, a practically oriented explanation of the corporate communication function within corporations is presented.

3.2.1. Corporate Communication Strategy

The application of strategic management theory on the field of corporate communication or public relations has been problematic and unclear for decades which has resulted in a long-lasting confusion of what a “corporate communication strategy” exactly is (Tibble, 1997). One of the main reasons for this unstable relationship between strategic management and corporate communication was the general absence or, in the best case, merely superficial consideration of communication in strategic management literature (Moss & Warnaby, 1998). Indeed, for a long time, corporate communication was just given some degree of importance as a supportive tactical tool in implementing strategies or as an decision-making area on the level of operations but was not analyzed as a stand-alone element in the strategic decision-making process (Kay, 1993; Moss & Warnaby, 1998).

To some scholars, it was clear that the connection between corporate communication and strategic management was more complex and significant than described above (Grunig, 1992; Haedrich, 1992). For example, public relations make it possible for organizations to build rapport with the stakeholders that reinforce the organization’s efforts of fulfilling its mission and reaching objectives (Grunig, 1992), therefore effectively setting the stage for maximizing the effectiveness of the overall corporate strategy. Consequently, strategically managing corporate communication leads to comprehensible effects on a company’s bottom line: These effects consist of cost savings resulting from positive relationships with stakeholders, because, in the opposite case, adverse connections with stakeholders would cause negative financial impacts (Grunig, 1992). Furthermore, Grunig (1992, p. 118) was one of the first scholars to point out the importance of a separate public relations function in order to effectively manage corporate communication. These academic considerations made their way into corporations and multinationals and thus, as the advantages of strategically positioned communication efforts became more apparent, organizations worldwide began integrating many previously separate and fragmented communication-related (sub-)departments into single communication-focused departments at the organizational level (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 57). According to Haedrich (1992, p. 262), the positive effect of corporate communication on organizations’ strategic effectiveness stems from the following benefits: Firstly, it enables organizations to create “strategic guidelines” that permit a clear differentiation when it comes to the way of communicating compared to other competitors. Secondly, because of these predefined strategic profiles, the organization is able to identify with relevant strategic stakeholders and vice versa, which leads to a strengthening of their relationships. Thirdly, corporations’ scope of action may expand because the correct execution of public relations leads to positive effects on societal legitimacy, which further supports organizations in reaching their objectives (Haedrich, 1992, p. 262).

Because of the above-mentioned demonstrations of shortcomings when it comes to the implications of corporate communication within strategic management and due to suggestions of possible points of contact between the two fields of literature (Grunig, 1992; Haedrich, 1992; Long & Hazelton, 1987; Moss & Warnaby, 1998; Tibble, 1997), various scholars attempted to fill this apparent research gap. As a result, one conceptualization in particular established itself as relatively accepted amongst academics, as it was used by a multitude of later scientific journal literature on corporate communication strategies, such as Grunig (2009), Grunig (2006), Grunig and Kim (2011), Soojin Kim (2016), Soojin Kim and Kim (2016), J.-N. Kim, Flora Hung-Baesecke, Yang, and Grunig (2013), Steyn (2007), Steyn (2004) and Steyn (2000): This conceptualization defines corporate communication strategy as being part of organizations' functional strategy. Since the functional strategy constitutes an organization's third and departmentally located level of strategy below the divisionally located business strategy level and headquartered corporate strategy level (Vancil & Lorange, 1975), it connects all strategies established at the two levels above with the operational plane of corporate communication and thus provides the framework necessary for potential communication plans' abilities to implement communicative solutions and measures supporting the strategic issues of the organization (Steyn, 2000, 2004). According to Steyn (2004, pp. 178–180), following the above definition, corporate communication as a strategic management function supports corporations' environmental adjustment by interacting with different stakeholder groups in acceptable ways, thus making it possible to maintain profitability while also maintaining an at least socially acceptable image. Furthermore, a successful corporate communication strategy determines relevant stakeholders and their related issues as well as potential for social interest around these issues. The purpose of the above is to establish the right relationships with each of these stakeholders in order for the corporation to reach its goals (Steyn, 2004, p. 180) and generate competitive advantages (Halal, 2000, p. 12). How effective a particular corporate communication strategy proves to be can, therefore, be measured by the results of organization-stakeholder relationships (Ki & Hon, 2007), successful organizational adaptations as responses to changes within stakeholder groups as well as any potentially arising competitive advantages (Steyn, 2004). In particular, competitive advantages are generated whenever changes in stakeholder climate are detected in time and thus corrective measures are still possible through inputs of the corporate communication function (Steyn, 2004, p. 180).

Aside from these academic advancements concerning the conceptualization and sensemaking of corporate communication strategies, the reality of the field within organizations worldwide showed that previously separate departments, such as "issues management", "direct marketing", "community relations", "investor relations" and many others were increasingly consolidated within the previously explained single corporate communication function

(Cornelissen, 2014, p. 81). This holistic union of the field of corporate communication was the main factor which made it possible to perform corporate communication as a functional strategy compared to the previous mostly tactical behavior of smaller separate departments within organizations. The underlying reasons for this increased effectiveness of corporate communication consisted of in-firm communication-related know-how being increasingly connected and centralized as well as relevant individuals becoming part of their respective companies' top management teams (Cornelissen, 2014).

In addition to definitions such as the ones presented in the previous chapter as well as representations of the above stated integrated view, scholarly descriptions of corporate communication in terms of its (sub-)functions are examined. For example, Argenti (1996, pp. 77–82) describes corporate communication as the main function encompassing the following areas of activity: Image and identity, corporate advertising, media relations, financial communications, employee relations, community relations and corporate philanthropy, government relations as well as crisis communications. Another example of the above method of illustration was proposed by Cornelissen (2014, p. 81), who uses a practically-inspired depiction of international corporations to illustrate the responsibilities and subfunctions of corporate communication, as shown by figure 2.

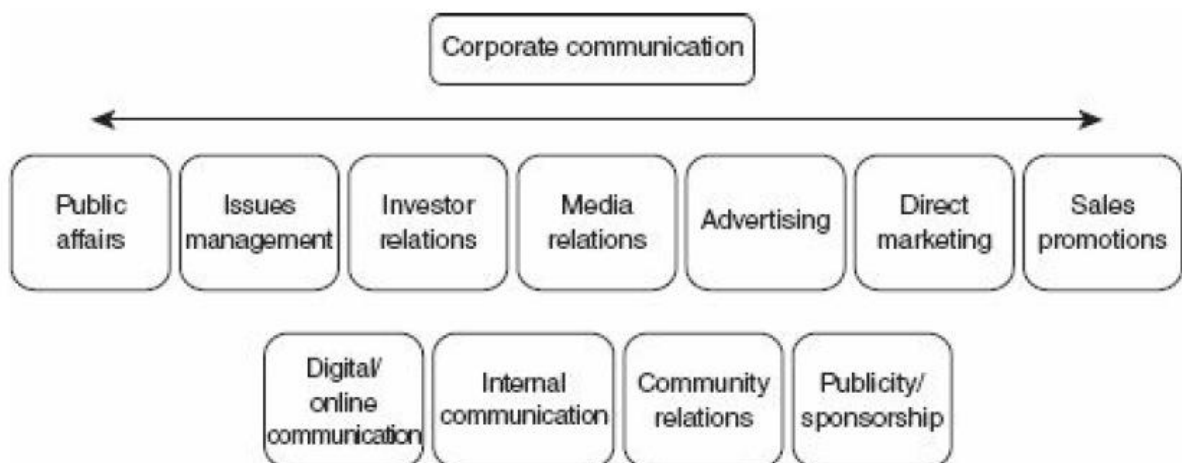


Figure 2: Corporate communication as an integrated framework for managing communication (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 81)

The above illustration by Cornelissen (2014, p. 81) shows corporate communication as a unified communications function, featuring the following subfunctions: Public affairs, issues management, investor relations media relations, advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, digital online communication, internal communication, community relations and publicity/sponsorship. On the grounds of further elaborating the scope of corporate

communication within this Master's Thesis, these subfunctions are explained. Firstly, the function of public affairs encompasses all actions with the goal of influencing the respective organization's political and policy-related environment in such a way that supports its strategic and business efforts (Davidson, 2015). Issues management deals with methods to determine, analyze and react to any issues, problems or crises that happen inside or outside of the company in question (such as critical situations caused by politics, societal developments or strategic decisions of the company, etc.) (Wartick & Rude, 1986). Investor relations' field of activity is aimed at communication-based methods and strategies with the objective of attracting financing for the organization in question, either directly from possible investors or indirectly by seeking attention from relevant information brokers such as investment banks or specialized and well-connected media outlets (Bushee & Miller, 2012, p. 868). Media relations deal with methods for obtaining the attention of relevant media actors which are relevant for reaching organizational goals (Grunig, 1990). Finally, the remaining subfunctions of corporate communication are explained (Cornelissen, 2014): Advertising is the process of striving for attention by means of paid media announcements, direct marketing comprises activities which allow to directly contact consumers individually with concrete offers, sales promotions represent all possible methods used to directly increase consumers' purchase potential (e.g., discounts, gifts, demonstrations), digital and online communication denotes corporate communication carried out via the internet (e.g., mail, websites, social media, etc.), internal communication is focused on the company's internal environment with employees as the main stakeholder, community relations include actions which strive to establish positive relationships with the society and community around the respective organization and, lastly, the subfunction "publicity/sponsorship" stands for methods which consist of the respective organization funding or supporting particular events or other organizations in return for media coverage (Cornelissen, 2014). Although, as it can be seen from the above illustration, the corporate communication function has a rather broad area of activity, some highly specialized related subfunctions remain part of other functional departments such as HR, M&A, marketing or finance (Cornelissen, 2014).

In conclusion, this Master's Thesis follows the above conceptualization of the corporate communication strategy being an integral part of an organization's functional strategy repertoire along with e.g., marketing, finance or operations. The next chapter will focus on existing theoretical models dealing with the development of corporate communication strategies. Despite its breadth of theoretical approaches (Mintzberg, Lampel, & others, 1999), two authors in particular (Steyn, 2004; Tibble, 1997) have conceptualized the development process of corporate communication strategies, which is discussed in the next chapter.

3.2.1.1. Corporate Communication Strategy Development

Before examining the actual corporate communication strategy development process, it is important to note that corporate communication plays both an anticipative and reactive role in how a company interacts with its environment. Because of this interplay, a particular corporate communication strategy represents not only a deliberate or planned strategy but also an emergent strategy that is changing its constitution based on the ongoing strategy development process of identifying key internal and external circumstances (Steyn, 2004, p. 180). Furthermore, as the prerequisite for being able to develop a corporate communication strategy, an organization needs to have at least some understanding of its corporate identity, which is a foundational element for all communications-related aspects of a given company: The corporate identity provides the basic figure of an organization's values and beliefs, which are transmitted to various external and internal stakeholders as corporate image and reputation through its corporate communication strategy as means of diffusion (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 53). Although, as stated above, corporate communication strategies are partly regarded as emergent because of their adaptive properties with respect to stakeholder behavior and loosely or undefined parameters at the beginning of their strategy development process (Steyn, 2004, p. 180), the following two conceptualizations by Tibble (1997) and Steyn (2004) solely focus on corporate communication strategies' projectable aspects and thus each of them represents a model of communication strategy development as a planned strategy.

Tibble (1997, pp. 358–361) was one of the first scholars to attempt a conceptualization of the development process of corporate communication strategies. His method consisted of applying elements from the field of public relations to the general model of strategy development: Firstly, relevant pieces of information are gathered in the "raw materials" stage, followed by the filtering of the previously gathered sources in the "refinement" stage. According to Tibble (1997, p. 359), this refinement shall be carried out through the usage of different strategic management concepts such as the SWOT or PESTEL analysis. After establishing the most important communication issues in the previous stage, linkages between these issues are identified and communication strategies are created around the previously discovered connections in the "strategy development" phase. Finally, the chosen strategies are tested in the "testing fit" stage and, should the test turn out negatively, the development process must be restarted. Only if the previously defined corporate communication strategy fits its purpose, it will be embedded into the organization, which allows further development and adjustment over time (Tibble, 1997, pp. 358–361).

Steyn (2004, pp. 174–181) further developed the conceptualization of the corporate communication strategy development process and thus created a more refined model,

describing it as follows: Firstly, the organization's internal and external environment is analyzed. While traditional elements such as mission, vision, values, policies and others are within the scope of the first analysis stage, the focus is placed on identifying interdependencies and connections between and within internal as well as external strategic stakeholders. Secondly, as a result of the environmental scanning stage, the organization's key strategic issues are identified and applied to the previously defined strategic stakeholders with the goal of accurately establishing the consequences of each strategic issue for each stakeholder. After prioritizing which issues and stakeholders are most important, a corporate communication strategy is formulated with the purpose of solving the problems stemming from the previously classified key strategic issue - stakeholder combinations, resulting in the identification of clear communication goals. Eventually, communications plans and actions plans are developed in order to reach these goals (Steyn, 2004, pp. 174–181). This process is outlined in figure 3.

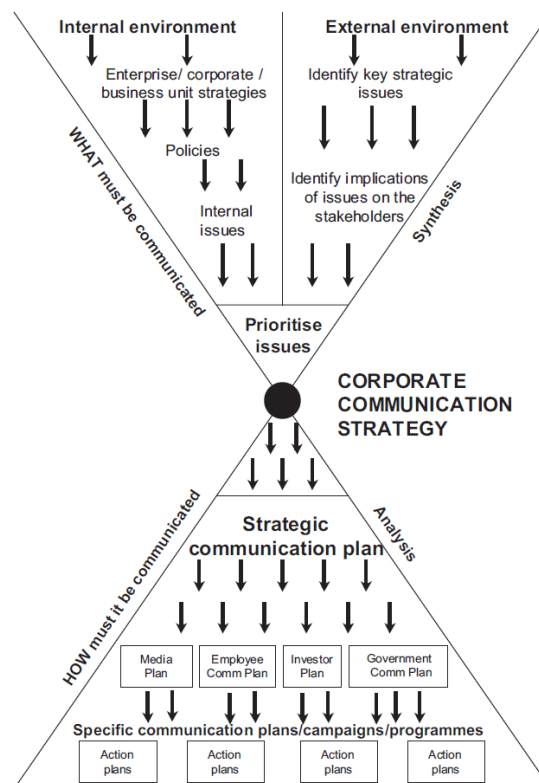


Figure 3: Corporate communication strategy comes before the communication plan (Steyn, 2004, p. 181)

As an example to the above development process, Steyn (2004, p. 180) mentions M&A as being a key strategic issue and employees as being key strategic stakeholders. When combining these two factors, one of the results is that employees could feel confusion and worry about possible job losses or other unwanted changes following the M&A process. Therefore, a possible solution in form of a corporate communication strategy may be to

improve employees' level of information on the effects of the merger or acquisition (Steyn, 2004, p. 180). In order to provide a more extensive portrayal of the above conceptual model, the following example featuring the key strategic issue of a new market entry and the respective government agencies as key strategic stakeholders is presented: One result of combining these two factors might be the lack of trust and knowledge of the government in/about the respective company. The respective organization's method of resolution in the form of a corporate communication strategy might then be to use company presentations/events, lobbying or negotiations in order to increase both the level of trust and information of the foreign government with the goal of realizing the key strategic factor "new market entry" in the most optimal way possible.

In conclusion, the development of a corporate communication strategy can be conceptualized as effectively as other strategic management processes (Steyn, 2004; Tibble, 1997). Nevertheless, although the strategy formulation process always follows a similar pattern, the resulting corporate communication strategies differ based on their content, their targeted stakeholders/receivers or the objectives that shall be achieved by corporate communication, resulting in different types of corporate communication strategies (Cornelissen, 2014; Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). The following chapter explores these strategies and proposes a typology of corporate communication strategies.

3.2.2. Types of Corporate Communication Strategies

This chapter analyzes characteristics of corporate communication strategies as depicted in established literature on the topic. The goal of this process is to identify the most applicable pieces of knowledge in order to discover and classify distinct patterns within corporate communication strategies. These patterns are meant to represent certain types of corporate communication strategies. The resulting typologies, while based on theory found in academic literature, deviate from the denomination or scope of definitions found in the respective literary sources. The reason for this *modus operandi* is based on the theoretical framework's optimization with regards to the objectives and research questions set forth in this Master's Thesis. Furthermore, adjustments are required in order to create the most suitable analytical foundation for the empirical part of this thesis. Keeping this in mind, three main types of corporate communication strategies are proposed and presented in the next subchapters.

The first classification is based on the stakeholder approach of corporate communication and features the two corporate communication strategies of internal and external corporate communication (Argenti, 1996; Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Cornelissen, 2014; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Here, the strategic categorization focuses on the receiving stakeholder(s) of the corporate communication. These communication strategies are complemented by corresponding focused areas of corporate communication identified in the relevant literature (Cornelissen, 2014; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Palmer & Hartley, 2012; Smidts, Pruyn, & van Riel, 2001; Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2018).

The second proposed way of categorizing corporate communication strategies is based on the content that the communication strategy is presenting. According to Sora Kim and Rader (2010), these classifications include corporate ability (expertise)-focused strategies, corporate social responsibility (image)-focused strategies and hybrid strategies. In the interest of providing a degree of elementariness when it comes to the terminology used in this Master's Thesis, the following denominations for the above-mentioned strategies are used: Expertise, image and hybrid corporate communication strategies. A detailed explanation is provided in the homonymous chapter and, as before, this typology is expanded by corresponding theory from literature on the topic (Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim, Kim, & Hoon Sung, 2014; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010).

The last typology of corporate communication strategies is based on the intended effects on the receivers/stakeholders and/or the motivation behind the sender of the communication strategy. In this context, Morsing and Schultz (2006) present three types of corporate

communication strategies: The informational strategy, the persuasive strategy and the involvement strategy. As before, this typological explanation is properly supplemented by additional literature on the focused corporate communication-related topic (Capriotti, 2011; Cornelissen, 2014).

Because of this Master's Thesis' focus on digital communication, two additional chapters discussing the effects of the internet and social media on corporate communication, respectively, are added. The objective of these chapters is to provide state-of-the-art knowledge added to the strategies discussed above and thus create an ideal theoretical basis for this thesis' empirical part, which focuses on digital representations of corporations' communication strategies.

The next subchapters will feature detailed explanations of all organizational communication strategies and related topics stated above.

3.2.2.1. Internal and External Corporate Communication Strategies

Cheney and Christensen (2001, p. 231) define internal communication as "employee relations, statements of mission and organizational development" and external communication as "public relations, marketing and issues management" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 231). However, the boundaries between internal and external communication are somewhat unclear and blended into each other, which can lead to situations where internal communication and external communication are one and the same type of corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 77). The reasons for that circumstance are found in linkages between the two types of communication as well as so-called "fuzzy boundaries" which may cause internal communication to become external and vice versa (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 180). Examples for the connectivity between internal and external communication include employees which fulfill roles of both internal and external stakeholders, such as the CEO of the company who internally represents the role of the organizational leader and externally portrays the company's main representative. A similar situation can be observed in cases where employees are, at the same time, customers of the organization they are working for (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 77). Furthermore, other examples are internal documents leaked to the company's environment or internally used data which originates from third parties (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 180). Finally, the increased pressure by societies on corporations to provide more transparency has also led to a merger of internal and external communication (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 77). That is why internal and external communication is often used and depicted as one integrated concept (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Internal and external communication follows the stakeholder approach (Cornelissen, 2014), meaning that strategies based on this typology vary depending on the importance of the targeted stakeholders to the organization in question. Therefore, in order to develop a corporate communication strategy targeted at specific stakeholders, it is essential to accurately identify the particularities of the recipients' relationship with the organization in order to understand the specific stakeholders' informative, normative and contextual demands and expectations (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 103). According to Cornelissen (2014), a stakeholder classification model (Mitchell et al., 1997) which is suited for this first fundamental step in the internal or external communication strategy formulation process is the stakeholder salience model by Mitchell et al. (1997), illustrated in figure 4. This model defines stakeholder groups dependent on the main variable called "salience", which represents the sum of (communication) managers' perceptions with regards to stakeholders' power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997).

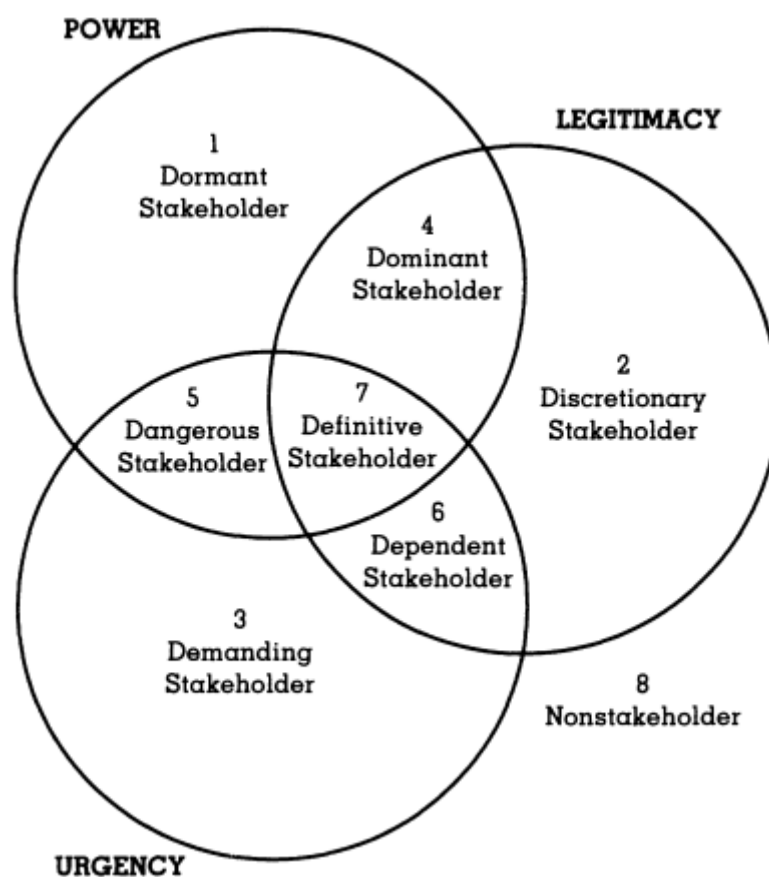


Figure 4: Stakeholder typology (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 874)

As it can be seen in the above illustration, Mitchell et al. (1997, p. 874) have defined seven separate stakeholder groups and an eighth group consisting of "non-stakeholders", i.e., parties without any stake in the respective organizations. The three illustrated circles represent the

three stakeholder attributes power (i.e., the ability of the stakeholder to impose his/her will on the organization), legitimacy (i.e., the validity and justification of the demand posed by the stakeholder toward the organization) and urgency (i.e., the expected and actual promptness of implementing what the stakeholder desires) (Mitchell et al., 1997). And, the stakeholder groups are positioned in context to the variables owned by them, with the outer three most stakeholders representing the group of “latent stakeholders” (consisting of dormant, discretionary and demanding stakeholders) which merely hold one variable, while those that hold two variables each make up the “expectant stakeholders” group (consisting of dominant, dependent and dangerous stakeholders). Finally, the stakeholders which hold all three variables and are arguably the most important ones are the so-called definitive stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 1997). In conclusion, it can be said that a particular stakeholder’s salience increases with his/her centrality within the above illustration.

For the purpose of providing a high level of completeness and elaborateness of this concept, the individual stakeholder groups defined by Mitchell et al. (1997, pp. 874–876) are described, starting with the group of “latent stakeholders”: Dormant stakeholders are parties which hold some degree of power, however, because their demands are neither urgent nor legitimate, the execution of their power remains on hold. These stakeholders are characterized by low interaction rates with the company and examples might include labor unions, ex-employees, large activist groups or influential third parties in general. Discretionary stakeholders are parties which possess a legitimate claim against the company but have neither the power nor any given urgency to act on it. Examples might include individual, non-influential critics or NGOs. Demanding stakeholders are characterized by high levels of initiated contact toward the respective company, however, they neither have the power nor any justification which backs their approaches. Protesters might serve as example for this particular stakeholder group (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 876). Secondly, the group of “expectant stakeholders” is presented (Mitchell et al., 1997, pp. 876–878): Dominant stakeholders are powerful and their demands are legitimate, they interact with the organization on a regular basis and mostly include (key) customers, employees, investors, key suppliers and other similar parties. Dangerous stakeholders consist of parties which are powerful and wish to act urgently but lack any justified claim. Dependent stakeholders, which mostly consist of parties negatively impacted by an organization’s actions, have legitimate claims and a sense of urgency regarding their demands but lack the necessary power to carry out their intentions and therefore are dependent on the goodwill of the corporation in question. “Expectant stakeholders” might become definitive if they acquire the missing variable needed to increase their saliency to the maximum degree. Finally, the most salient stakeholder group, the definitive stakeholders, score high with regards to all three variables. In order for a stakeholders to reach

such a high level of salience, they usually need to be strongly embedded in the dominant coalition of the company and thus this particular stakeholder group is mostly represented by majority shareholders. (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 878).

As illustrated and explained, the above model represents an ideal basis for classifying one of the guiding elements of any corporate communication strategy: the target stakeholder. Furthermore, because the above model is basically a snap-shot of an organizations' stakeholder relationship network, it is possible to continuously track any particularities of stakeholder relations and thus change strategies accordingly (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 108). This is especially useful considering the particularities of corporate communication strategies as being both reactive and anticipative strategies (Steyn, 2004). In conclusion, internal and external corporate communication consists of strategically managing stakeholders' communication processes from the inside to the outside of the company or solely within the internal sphere of the organization (Argenti, 1996; Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Cornelissen, 2014; Dirsmith & Covalleski, 1983; Mitchell et al., 1997; Welch & Jackson, 2007). However, because of the two communication strategies' distinct differences when it comes to their interrelationships, effects and modes of functioning as well as the relevant factors for creating strategies, both shall be reviewed individually in the next two subchapters.

3.2.2.1.a Internal Corporate Communication Strategy

Internal corporate communication is part of an organization's internal environment, together with its structure, processes, culture, and other elements (Palmer & Hartley, 2012; Wheelen et al., 2018). All these elements taken together affect all members of the respective internal environment on an individual and psychological level. The employees' shared perception of the internal environment results in the organizational climate, which is defined by a number of facets including the communication climate (Smidts et al., 2001, p. 1053). The communication climate influences all information-related aspects of the internal environment and its efficiency and success is determined by dimensions such as trust and acceptance within employee-to-employee communications, the ability to engage in decision making-related communicative processes and helpfulness of employees among themselves (Smidts et al., 2001, p. 1053). Therefore, it is possible to draw conclusions about the performance of an organization's internal communication strategy by analyzing its internal environment and experiencing the communication climate resulting from it. This performance is measured by the respective internal communication strategy's ability to reach its goals. In this context, Welch and Jackson (2007, p. 188) identify the following goals of internal corporate communication: The creation and maintenance of employees' sense of belonging to the company; Strengthening employee commitment by making certain improvements to relationships with and among employees;

Advancing employees' understanding of the organizations' changing environment and the underlying reasons for the organizations' responses to external inputs. These objectives are linked to each other and are influenced by the quality of internal corporate communication, which, if performed correctly, creates trust amongst employees, leading to them being committed and resulting in a proactive staff that understands the strategic decisions taken by top management (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 190). Smidts et al. (2001) further argue that a positive communication climate has strengthening effects on internal corporate communication goals such as employee commitment and identification with the company. Going further, it can be said that the culture as well as the structure of an organization's internal environment, is essential for forging a communication climate that supports an internal communication strategy capable of reaching organizational goals (Smidts et al., 2001; Welch & Jackson, 2007). While this statement may be true for evaluations on a holistic level, it is important to view the state of internal communication within a company from a fragmented point of view based on the respective organization's structural and hierarchical levels (Welch & Jackson, 2007). In this context, when it comes to the relationship between internal corporate communication and firm performance, Lenz (1981) argues that highly rigid organizational structures featuring formalized corporate communication leads to managers focusing on improving internal effectiveness and reducing inefficiencies while Dirsmith and Covaleski (1983) suggest that more open and flexible internal corporate communication is reflective of executives who rather focus on environmental changes and resulting organizational reactions.

The perspective on which internal communication strategies are based is named the internal stakeholder approach. And, as shown in the previous chapter, the particularities of each internal communication strategy vary depending on the targeted internal stakeholders' attributes. However, as this chapter deals with internal communication on a more detailed level, the involved senders and recipients of information, or, in other words, the exact stakeholders who affect and are affected by internal communication (Argenti, 1996; Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Welch & Jackson, 2007), are identified and analyzed. The main group of internal stakeholders includes the following participants on different levels within an observed organizational structure: Strategic management consisting of the dominant coalition, top management and other managers occupying strategic roles; Operational managers including supervisors, middle and line managers; Teams within divisions and departments; Project teams as well as all employees which are not part of the above groups stated above (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 184). Aside from the implicated parties in internal corporate communication processes, directions of communication are essential for understanding the dynamics of the topic: When it comes to the level of line, team or project management internal communication, the direction of the communication process is (predominantly) two-way, which

results from the hierarchical position of the involved participants (senders as well as receivers) being on a similar or equal footing, while the direction of top strategic level internal communication is predominantly asymmetrical due to the superior hierarchical position of the senders of communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 185). Obviously, the content of the internal communication varies on the basis of the previously described levels of communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 185): Generally speaking, the relevancy for the entire organization is higher the greater the distance with regards to the hierarchical level between sender and receiver. In contrast to that, internal communication within (project) teams or on the operational level is geared at transmitting more specific information (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 185).

In conclusion, the internal environment consisting of, among others, organizational structures, processes and culture, influences the overall communication climate and thus the way in which internal communication is performed within an organization on a macro-level targeted at all employees and other internal stakeholders of a respective organization or on a micro-level between individual or groups of internal stakeholders (Smidts et al., 2001; Welch & Jackson, 2007). From the micro-level perspective within organizations, however, internal communication differs regarding content, importance and scope depending on the affected organizational levels and participants of a communicative process, such as line management, team or project-related internal communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

3.2.2.1.b External Corporate Communication Strategy

The core purpose of external corporate communication strategies stems from the universal necessity of every organization to interact with its external environment so as to economically function, and, in order to achieve this, interactions are created by inputs and exchanges of information (Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1983). In this context, Dirsmith and Covaleski (1983, pp. 138–139) argue that external communication and its underlying strategies are heavily dependent on the nature of the respective organization's environment: In stable, simple and established environments, such as the agriculture or oil market, the nature of external communication relies on maintaining the current status quo. This might be done, for example, by communicating historical performances and achievements that support the respective organization's role as an environmentally essential player with the according track record, such as stable growth figures and products/services holding market shares over long periods of time. In contrast to that example, dynamic environments such as high-tech sectors require the completely opposite type of external communication: Because of the very nature of those environments which consist of changes being the norm rather than the exception, organizations' situated within these environments shall ideally focus their external communication strategies on proving their ability to adapt (Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1983, p. 139)

by, for example, illustrating successful changes in business strategies and turnarounds of previously underperforming products/services. However, in practice, an external communication strategy always reflects some degree of dynamism and stability in combination targeted at the relevant external stakeholders (Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1983).

An organization's external environment is not the only deciding factor when it comes to formulating and executing external communication strategies. The corporate and business strategies, which are formulated by the organization itself, need to be adequately supported by an organization's external communication function which projects the appropriate information to the respective company's outside environment (Steyn, 2004). This external environment which makes up the area of effect of external corporate communication is comprised of an organization's macro-level environment, consisting of political, economic, societal, technological, ecological and legal environments as well as its micro-level environment which is represented by its task environment consisting of various stakeholders. (Palmer & Hartley, 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007; Wheelen et al., 2018). In more detail, in contrast to the internal communication strategy, the external communication strategy follows an external stakeholder approach, meaning that the targets of all external communication strategies are entities such as customers, suppliers, potential investors, political groups, social groups, governmental bodies, communities, trade associations, potential business partners, etc. (Cornelissen, 2014). Thus, the central notion of the external stakeholder approach is that, for an organization to economically function, it is necessary for that particular company to be considered legitimate by as many relevant external stakeholder groups as possible, including both business and non-business-related parties. Consequently, external corporate communication strategies have to support the overall corporate strategy by fulfilling two purposes: On the one hand, instrumental purposes which are necessary for the respective company to deliver the performance needed to exist and grow, and, on the other hand, normative reasons which have to be fulfilled so that the organization's environment, consisting of the external stakeholders described above agree with the existence of said organization (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 99).

These internally and externally originating effects and implications on external corporate communication strategies are made up of different contents being used in the final strategy, either alone or in combination, such as elements consisting of quantitative, qualitative, comparable, historical, forecasted or any other type of information, resulting in distinct and specialized types of strategies (Cornelissen, 2014; Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1983). There are communication sub-functions which exclusively carry out specialized external communication strategies, such as "issues management, community relations, investor relations, media

relations and public affairs” (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 74). Some specialized external communication strategies might focus on certain stakeholders’ groups only, for example, strategies which exclude customers as target stakeholders and are only directed at corporate stakeholders. However, these strategies might be even more focused and targeted at one specific stakeholder in combination with one specific issue, such as buffering strategies (i.e., strategies which specifically ignore certain issues in contact with certain stakeholders), bridging strategies (i.e., strategies which have the goal of finding win-win agreements with certain stakeholders on certain issues) or advocacy strategies (i.e., strategies which focus on enforcing the corporation’s objective on the stakeholder concerning one specific issue) (Cornelissen, 2014, 289-201). Theoretically, these strategies might also partly include internal stakeholders, however, first and foremost, they are externally geared (Cornelissen, 2014).

The next chapters deviate from the stakeholder-approach and introduce other communication strategies based on the content of communication as well as the objective of communication.

3.2.2.2. Expertise, Image and Hybrid Corporate Communication Strategies

As mentioned in the preceding chapters, the main function of corporate communication strategy is to assist a corporation in reaching its objectives by interacting with its relevant publics/stakeholders (Steyn, 2007; Tibble, 1997). The way in which corporate communication can successfully fulfil this function is by creating certain associations about the respective company inside their stakeholders’ minds (Sora Kim & Rader, 2010), similar to how marketers strive to create certain associations for their offered products or services amongst their target customer groups (Brown & Dacin, 1997). In this context, Sora Kim and Rader (2010, p. 60) have introduced three types of corporate communication strategies inspired by corporate associations identified in marketing literature (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Schumann, Hathcote, & West, 1991). According to Brown and Dacin (1997, p. 69) corporate associations represent an individual’s cognitive image of a company, including: Every piece of knowledge that the individual has about the respective company’s actions; Any experiences from interacting with the company, whether self-experienced or indirectly conceived; Perceptions about how a company behaves and conducts business; Emotional responses with regards to the company; And, the individual’s general evaluation of the company.

The existence of these three types of corporate communication strategies is based on the content of communication and can, therefore, be classified according to the resulting associations created in receivers’ minds: Corporate ability (CAb) strategies, corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies and hybrid strategies (Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim & Rader,

2010). Because of this Master's Thesis' focus on the field of strategic management and organizational behavior, two of the above marketing-related terms are replaced by the following denominations for the remainder of this thesis: "Expertise" instead of "corporate ability" and "image" instead of "corporate social responsibility".

An expertise corporate communication strategy underlines an organization's expertise, ability, know-how, products or services in terms of quality, utility, price or other attributes (Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010). Ideally, an expertise strategy should create positive psychological associations within its receivers' minds regarding the company's economic performance as well as its created value to the consumer through its products and services. As more focused versions of expertise-based communication strategies, Cornelissen (2014, p. 74) presents "corporate advertising" and "marketing public relations": The first type of strategy focuses on the presentation of the company as a whole while the latter focuses on products or services. In this context, Cornelissen (2014) argues that both types complement the effectivity of each other, especially if both strategies are carried out in an integrated way by the same communications department. An image corporate communication strategy, on the other hand, does not focus on a company's offering in terms of products or services and business performance, but strives to position the organization as a valuable, lawful, legitimate, committed and well-intentioned member of society (Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010). Such strategies should ideally place into their receivers' minds the idea of the corporation as an entity which is not only focusing on creating a monetary profit for itself and its shareholders but striving to make a positive impact of any other kind on the rest of society (Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim et al., 2014; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010). And, a hybrid strategy combines elements of both an image and expertise strategy in equal or close to equal measure, which allows for the creation of more customizable and flexible solutions when it comes to influencing stakeholder perceptions (Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim et al., 2014; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010).

Which strategy is ultimately chosen depends on the intentions and goals of a particular company: If the goal is to create expertise-related associations, which consist of positive perceptions of company-related products and services, then a expertise-focused corporate communication strategy is the right choice, and, similarly, if the objective is to create image-related associations that lead to legitimizing the corporation as a utility-producing member of society, an image communication strategy represents the ideal choice (Sora Kim, 2011). Finally, a corporation may also choose to focus both on profit-oriented and normative expectations of their stakeholders at the same time by employing a hybrid strategy (Sora Kim, 2011).

The study by Sora Kim (2011), which analyzed two well-known Fortune 500 companies, has produced the following correlations and implications regarding expertise, image and hybrid corporate communication strategies (Sora Kim, 2011, pp. 234–236): First of all, new associations tend to enhance older ones, resulting in an evolutionary development of corporate associations over time. Secondly, an image strategy promotes both image and expertise associations, whereas an expertise strategy just promotes expertise associations. This implies that most companies using image strategies are relatively established when it comes to expertise associations and thus image associations resulting from image strategies automatically enhance expertise associations as well (Sora Kim, 2011). Furthermore, a study by Chaudhri and Wang (2007) has found out that internationally active organizations with business locations in both developed and developing countries are prone to using image corporate communication strategies more often in established regions compared to their developing counterparts. Moreover, while hybrid strategies are effective in increasing both expertise and image associations, image strategies are still more effective in fulfilling the same purpose (Sora Kim, 2011). The same study has also produced correlations between company characteristics and the choice of corporate communication strategies, such as stronger expertise associations as a result of image strategies for companies in the FMCG industry compared to IT companies (Sora Kim, 2011). In this regard, Sora Kim (2011) argues that expertise associations are generally high for IT companies and thus are not as easily influenced as those of companies dealing with less technological consumer products.

To conclude, three dominant types of corporate communication strategies based on their content have been identified by academic literature (Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim et al., 2014; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010). And, these strategies can be clearly classified based on observing relevant indicators of each particular strategy, represented by their respective content. The next chapter focuses on strategies based on objectives of corporate communication.

3.2.2.3. Information, Persuasion and Involvement Corporate Communication Strategies

The intended effects of corporate communication strategies can also represent guiding principles of their underlying strategies. Morsing and Schultz (2006) and Cornelissen (2014) illustrate this approach with the following model, where three distinct strategies are defined. In order to provide a superior level and quality of theoretical knowledge to this Master's Thesis, the following approach is synthesized from both the original approach by Morsing and Schultz (2006) as well as the expansion thereto by Cornelissen (2014). This model is illustrated in figure 5.

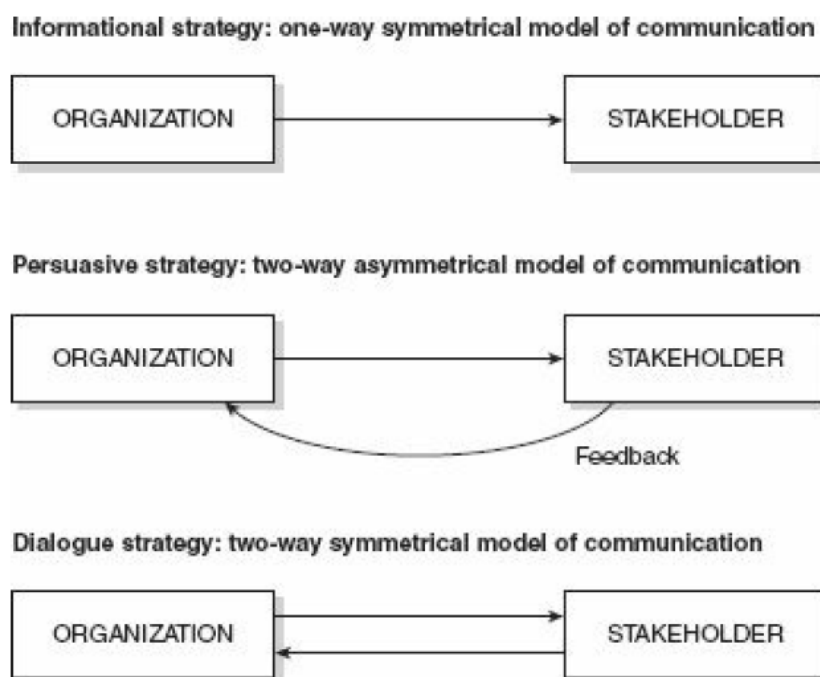


Figure 5: Models of organization-stakeholder communication (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 112)

The illustrated strategies are: The informational, persuasive and dialogue communication strategies (it is noted that the denomination of the “dialogue” strategy in the above model shall be “involvement” strategy for the remainder of this thesis). The differences between these strategies stem from the depth and extent of the intended influences on the respective stakeholders. An informational strategy mainly strives to create awareness and give sense to what the respective organization is communicating by transmitting information to the stakeholder in the form of providing facts about the content of the communication strategy (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327). While such a procedure might also provide support concerning stakeholders’ understanding for what the organization is communicating and/or certain decisions taken by the company, the main goal of this strategy is purely to inform (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 110). Therefore, in this case, the design focus of the corporate

communication function lies in presenting the related messages in a way that is consistent and attractive enough to both inform and keep the receiver of the communication interested in consuming the conveyed information (van Riel & Blackburn, 1995). Compared to this, a persuasive strategy has the objective of not just transmitting information, but influencing a stakeholder's behavior, perception, attitude and know-how in a way that results in a beneficial reaction for the organization (i.e., recommendations, endorsements or purchases by the stakeholders), for example by changing the receiver's opinion on a certain topic or creating a positive image about the corporation and its values, its products and/or services (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 110–111; Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327). While the communication function's task is, in this case, also to perform the necessary tactics in an appealing way, the focus here also lies on evaluating the effects resulting from stakeholders' reactions to the employed persuasion strategy, i.e., analyzing whether or not persuasion attempts were successful and investigating possible causes behind the results (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327). Finally, a dialogue/an involvement strategy strives to engage and/or commit the receiver to interact with the organization in a mutual interaction-based exchange of information away from corporate self-interests and towards win-win situations (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 111; Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 328). In this context, the corporate communication function is not only involved in the related communication processes via informing or evaluating stakeholders' actions, but also by setting up and maintaining the resources and channels needed to communicate and engage with several stakeholders over certain amounts of time and on a constant or frequent basis (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 328). The effect of such strategies may also include persuading the targeted stakeholders, however, this would happen as a result of mutual engagement within a communicative process and not because of the objectives of the communication strategy itself (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 328). Morsing and Schultz (2006, p. 328) argue that an involvement communication strategy might also lead to changes of the organization itself as a result of dialogues with stakeholders. In conclusion, these three strategies are clearly meant to target different stakeholder groups that differ in their level of importance for the organization in question because of their relevant, previously introduced variables. And, because stakeholders' significance for the organization may change over time, these corporate communication strategies make it possible for the organization to behaviorally adapt to these changes so that the communication more closely matches the quality of the relationship between organizations and certain stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 111).

The complexities of these three different communication strategies are also reflected by their particular directions and the hierarchical positions of the sender (organization) and the receiver (stakeholder) within the communicative process (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). The informational communication strategy follows a one-way communication model, as the communicative

process originates from the corporation and travels to the stakeholder without any response expected or needed from the receiver (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 326). Furthermore, this strategy is deemed to be symmetrical because no party strives to gain an advantage over the other as the sole goal of this strategy is to factually inform (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 111). However, because of the one-sidedness of the source(s) of information and the one-directional dissemination of the communicative process, Capriotti (2011, p. 362) argues that the informational communication strategy is actually asymmetric, i.e., favoring the organization. When it comes to the persuasion strategy, the mode of communication is based on a two-way model, as a reaction from the stakeholder is expected by the corporation and thus communication flows to and from both parties (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327). However, the communicative process, in this case, is clearly asymmetrical, because the two communicating parties are not interacting on an equal footing, i.e., the corporation is trying to change or modify the stakeholder's behavior while the stakeholder is not in a position to do so, which places the organization at a superior position compared to the receiver and thus makes the entire communication model asymmetrical in favor of the company (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 112; Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327). In this context, Morsing and Schultz (2006, p. 328) argue that the persuasive communication strategy is not truly a two-way form of communication, but actually tends to being a one-directional strategy due to the foundational set-up of these strategies being highly biased in favor of their creators, i.e., the organizations formulating and executing them. Finally, the involvement strategy is a prime example for two-way communication, as the objective of this type of strategy is to initiate an exchange between the two parties, and, because, in this instance, the goal of the communication is to create a mutually beneficial result, the two engaged parties are placed on the same hierarchical level within their communicative processes (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 112; Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 328). Morsing and Schultz (2006, p. 328) regard a communicative climate based on an eye-level mode of communication consisting of equality, neutrality and openness as the prerequisite for an involvement communication strategy to fundamentally reach its desired goal, as any deviation from this situation (especially by the respective organization) would lead to the stakeholder losing trust and/or interest in engaging with the company.

The tactics used to implement the above strategies also vary greatly: For instance, the go-to methods for disseminating an informational strategy are press releases, reports, magazines, facts and figures shown online or in company presentations (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327). Furthermore, popular tactics for persuasive communication strategies are advertisements of any kind, ranging from classical tv spots and face-to-face communication with stakeholders to comprehensive PR campaigns (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 111). Lastly, an involvement strategy is arguably the most complex strategy to tactically carry out, as the goal here is to set a mutually

beneficial exchange of information in motion. In order to encourage a particular stakeholder to engage in such an endeavor, it is necessary to invest accordingly into each individual stakeholder, which means that corresponding tactics require more effort on the organizations' side compared to the previously mentioned strategies (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 110). Tactics used to execute involvement communication strategies might include, for example, face-to-face meetings, company events, customer relationship ventures (via phone or digitally), social media exchanges, and many more. Cornelissen (2014, p. 114) mentions that media featuring impersonal and factual messages are suited for informational communication strategies, while more personalized, emotional, controversial and interaction-based media favor either involvement or persuasive communication strategies.

In conclusion, three types of corporate communication strategies have been identified on the basis of organizations' underlying communicative objectives (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). In practice, external observers are not able to conduct this classification as easily as the two preceding communication strategy typologies because strategic objectives are, ultimately, internal information.

Capriotti (2011) argues that technological developments relevant to corporate communication significantly changed the way professionals choose and execute strategies and, therefore, corporate communication strategies have shifted towards being more oriented towards involving stakeholders. More specifically, the internet and especially social media have drastically altered the way that contact between organizations and their relevant stakeholders functions (Adams & Frost, 2006, 2006; Capriotti, 2011; Colleoni, 2013; Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012; Ki & Hon, 2006; Sora Kim et al., 2014; Mills, 2012). The implications resulting from this development are explored in the following two chapters.

3.2.2.4. Corporate Communication Strategies in a Digital World

The emergence of the internet has led to the birth of digital communication which has become an essential part of corporations' communication strategies (Adams & Frost, 2006) because of, in part, their tremendous potential for stakeholder relationship creation and maintenance (Ki & Hon, 2006). According to Capriotti (2011, p. 359), "The impact of the Internet on corporate communication...reveals a crucial difference before and after widespread access to web technology". While the theoretical core of corporate communication strategies has remained the same, the internet has dramatically changed both the implementation, execution and effects of these strategies, which are now enabled in a faster and more interactive way while simultaneously affecting more participants in greater scale and scope (Sora Kim et al., 2014). Indeed, the access to information has never before been as uncomplicated, fast and far-reaching as it is today. For instance, communication is no longer bound by the traditional understanding of time and time zones, as the internet allows organizations to reach and be contacted by their stakeholders at virtually any time (Capriotti, 2011). Therefore, the internet has substantially increased corporations' exposure to diverse stakeholder groups worldwide (Adams & Frost, 2006; Capriotti, 2011; Ki & Hon, 2006). Furthermore, Adams and Frost (2006, p. 283) state that corporate communication strategies have shifted from being reporting-based to interaction-based. It must be noted, however, that around that particular article's year of publication, the interactive potential that digital technologies had for corporate communication was quite far from being fully used (Ki & Hon, 2006, p. 28) and that, especially since the expansion of social media and similar online platforms, the degree of interactivity within communication has steadily increased (Colleoni, 2013). In general, it can be said that web technologies have not only increased the pace and accessibility of corporate communication as well as the reach to and access of possible target stakeholders, but, at the same time, the potential for personalization and customization of corporate communication through its numerous face-to-face communication channels has substantially increased to levels that were deemed impossible prior to the digital age (Capriotti, 2011). Not only particularities of (corporate) communication processes themselves have undergone major transformations because of the emergence of the web, but aspects regarding the product of communication, i.e., information, have also fundamentally changed (Capriotti, 2011, p. 360): Because of the ease of information generation, the amount of available data online has skyrocketed in such a way that there is much more information available than actually required, resulting in an "information overload". Because of the reasons stated above, the internet has completely rearranged and disrupted the relationship between organizations and their stakeholders with regards to how they communicate, resulting in a myriad of advantages as well as disadvantages for both parties (Adams & Frost, 2006; Ki & Hon, 2006).

For instance, Adams and Frost (2006, pp. 293–295) have identified the following advantages of digital communication for organizations compared to more traditional methods of reporting and communicating: Accessibility, which is the ability to make information accessible to a global audience; Flexibility, which means that companies can easily change or update their information delivery; Reduced costs as digital reporting can be copied infinitely at no additional cost. Moreover, Ki and Hon (2006, p. 36) argue that transparency and potential for relationship building with stakeholders has increased, as corporate websites are an effective way of directly addressing target audiences without the need for any other information brokers acting as middlemen. Other advantages suggested by Capriotti (2011, p. 363) include: The ability to communicate to more than one stakeholder group at the same time and across internal as well as external boundaries; A seemingly higher degree of control over the information dissemination process; Greater potential for customizing communication for specific stakeholder groups; Time savings as a result of digital replication possibilities; Higher control over the dissemination of information as the power of middlemen on the internet is lower compared to traditional media. What is more, the increased speed of information diffusion offered by web technologies compared to more traditional media does not only directly affect a corporation's communicative efficiency, but also drastically affects stakeholder behavior as a response to corporate communication, resulting in an increased level of convenience for modern and dynamic stakeholders and, in turn, increasing potentially positive returns from these effects (Guillamón-Saorín & Martínez-López, 2013).

Obviously, the digital era has also brought with it several disadvantages for corporate communication. For example, substantial amounts of information on the internet are unaudited, false or intentionally altered, owing to the fact that the internet is, in large parts unregulated (Adams & Frost, 2006) or overregulated/censored (Yang, 2016) which has, over time, led to events of global proportions such as fake news influencing world politics or states censoring large parts and/or highly established services of the internet (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Yang, 2016). Furthermore, as digital technologies become more sophisticated, current disadvantages might become even more pronounced, as proven by the introduction of so-called deep-fakes, which have exponentially increased users' tendencies to misrepresent videos online (Chesney & Citron, 2018). While these disadvantages do not necessarily influence corporate communication per se and in every aspect, large numbers of stakeholders are still affected in multiple ways, which might decrease the overall effectiveness of digital corporate communication. This correlation can especially be seen in conjunction with the above-described increased stakeholder dynamism, which, if enforcing a negative effect resulting from false or harmful communication, significantly worsens any follow-up effects due to the internet's high-speed information diffusion capabilities (Guillamón-Saorín & Martínez-

López, 2013). In this context, Guillamón-Saorín and Martínez-López (2013, p. 519) describe the example of financial markets, which have not only grown tremendously with regards to participants but also in transaction speed since the rise of the internet: Because of stakeholders' increased comfort level and high reliance on digital financial communication for investment decisions, negative financial effects might result as a consequence of diffusing low quality, overshared and/or flawed information via the internet. Another indirect challenge to corporate communication in the internet age is the fact that, because people, in general, tend to share negative experiences more frequently than positive ones, the effect of this habit is multiplied exponentially due to the internet's information-sharing capabilities (Schlosser, 2005), which might put additional pressure on corporate communication departments when faced with increasing amounts of negative comments coming from various third parties. This negative word-of-mouth effect, pushed by dissatisfied or otherwise negatively affected stakeholders in combination with social media's potential for virality (which is explained in the next chapter) (Mills, 2012) might create especially complex situations for corporate communication and, more specifically, crisis management to handle (Timothy Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Another easily omitted disadvantage of digital communication is that there are still sizeable portions of world without access to the internet: Although the entire world population's internet usage has risen by 1125% from 2000 to 2019, it is estimated that 42,7% of the world population still lives without internet access as per July 20th 2019 (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2019), which means that digital corporate communication is not relevant for almost half of all humans.

One key observation regarding companies' attitudes towards digital communication made by Adams and Frost (2006) was the occurrence of patterns that resulted in either a proactive or skeptical view of using digital channels as an important element within the overall corporate communication strategy. A more distinct pattern was discovered by Ki and Hon (2006, p. 38), who identified differences in how stakeholder relationships were managed using corporate websites based on organizations' industries: For example, IT organizations were more likely to focus on creating an enjoyable experiences for website visitors, the industrial sector focused on providing unbiased and transparent information, and the utility sector stood out for the best ease of access of website functions. These observations from 2006 are precursors to the current heterogeneousness of companies' digital presences.

Scholars have identified numerous correlations between organizations' characteristics and the choice of digital corporate communication strategies. For example, Sora Kim and Rader (2010), who have analyzed websites of Fortune 500 companies, have identified the pattern that the majority of the top 100 of the Fortune 500 companies prefer using image strategies over expertise strategies on corporate websites. The bottom 400 Fortune 500 companies,

however, have a preference for expertise strategies. The authors' argumentation for this circumstance is that larger corporations possess greater exposure and with it also greater amounts of incoming website traffic, resulting in higher scrutiny from a larger part of society (Sora Kim & Rader, 2010, p. 75).

In conclusion, the arrival and growth of the internet has and continues to have profound implications on the way communication is conducted between organizations and their publics. And, consequently, corporations have reacted by adapting their corporate communication strategies to these new circumstances (Sora Kim & Rader, 2010). However, as the extent of the new digital dimension continued to evolve, an even greater game-changer of communication ascended: Social media (Sora Kim et al., 2014). The next chapter explains its especially weighty effects on the communication process and corporate communication strategies.

3.2.2.5. Social Media and Corporate Communication Strategies

Although websites and "traditional" means of digital communication have certainly increased both the speed, diffusion and interactivity of corporate communication, social media has magnified these effects considerably (Sora Kim et al., 2014). Indeed, social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter have reshaped the way online communication is conducted from a "one-to-many" and/or "one-to-one" to a "many-to-many" or "any-to-any" interactive sphere where the boundaries between who creates and who consumes information have merged and/or are blurred, and, due to social media's platform-based nature, all types of actors present, including organizations, have become stakeholders within the online communication process that takes place (Capriotti, 2011; Colleoni, 2013, p. 233; Mills, 2012). According to Jo and Kim (2003, p. 214), web-based interactive elements have positive effects on relationships with stakeholders by opening the possibility to make a certain corporation's role within a particular community more comprehensible to the public, which, in turn, also promotes stakeholders' commitment to the organization in question. Furthermore, Capriotti (2011, p. 359) argues that social media, because of its informational transparency, has become an equalizer when it comes to participants' standing within the communication process by "facilitating the bidirectional and symmetrical communication between organizations and stakeholders".

This has led to a highly impactful implication for the digital corporate communication process in general, namely, the disbandment of the role of the middleman played by traditional media between corporations and their publics (Khang et al., 2012). Another unprecedented

phenomenon resulting from social media platforms is the concept of virality, which denotes the situation when a piece of content or information becomes extremely popular on social media platforms because a large number of participants come in contact with it. Similar to a “virus” in the traditional sense, the object which has become viral is contagious and spreads among participants in an exponential way, becoming self-multiplying in the process (Mills, 2012, p. 163). The core of these effects lies, according to Capriotti (2011, p. 360), in the role reversal of stakeholders from “passive receivers to active senders”: Whereas, in previous times, stakeholders received information from an organization and were only able to respond with much effort and difficulty, if at all, in today’s internet era, the process of stakeholder-to-organization contact approaches is not only as easy as never before, but stakeholders can actually transmit information themselves as easily as any multinational corporation.

These peculiarities of social media have brought with them additional challenges to the execution of corporate communication. For example, according to Khang et al. (2012), crisis management has never been as complex as it is today because social media has enabled an extreme freedom of information diffusion and, due to organizations’ positioning as “one of many social media profiles”, it has become increasingly difficult for individual entities to control flows of data, which, in turn, can lead to unwanted reactions by stakeholders and substantially damage organizations’ reputations (Coombs, 2007). In practice, any Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or social media user can share and create whatever content he/she wants (as long as it is in line with the respective social media site’s terms and conditions and deemed legal by the respective authorities), including unfavorable comments about certain organizations.

Naturally, organizations all around the world have seized the tremendously powerful tools of online and social media corporate communication and, through their usage, different strategic patterns have been observed. As an example, Capriotti (2011, p. 362) states that because of the higher flexibility of social media compared to more traditional media, two-way communication and stakeholder engagement have drastically risen as strategic communication choices of organizations worldwide, leading to the conclusion that communications-related technological advances will, on the long term, lead to the usage of more involvement-focused communication strategies and less informational and/or persuasive communication strategies. Furthermore, in their analytical study of Fortune 100 corporations’ Facebook profiles, Sora Kim et al. (2014) have identified that the overwhelming majority of analyzed organizations adhere to expertise corporate communication strategies, which, according to the authors, might be explained by consumers’ expectations of promotional deals from corporations on social media. This stands in contrast to the findings of Sora Kim and Rader (2010), who reported that the top 100 of Fortune 500 corporations focus on image

strategies on their respective corporate websites. Therefore, this discrepancy suggests the existence of differences in how communication strategies are formulated and implemented depending on whether the function is performed through websites or social media (in this case Facebook) (Sora Kim et al., 2014).

The conclusion of this chapter is that social media has been the latest revolution in the field of corporate communication, both equalizing the playing field between corporations and their publics while introducing a more unfiltered exchange of information which exponentially intensifies the spread of particularly attractive pieces of information (Mills, 2012). The next chapter features a summary of insights on the previously introduced corporate communication strategies.

3.2.3. Framework of Corporate Communication Strategy Typologies

In order to provide a better visualization and understanding of the insights analyzed in the last chapters about corporate communication strategies, an overview of the most relevant insights from the above literature review of the three main corporate communication strategy typologies has been compiled:

Strategic main typology	Strategic communication focus	Strategic sub-typologies	Strategic communication focus
Internal and external corporate communication	Targeted stakeholders of corporate communication: Dormant, discretionary, demanding, dominant, dependent, dangerous, definitive stakeholders	Internal corporate communication	Corporate communication involving internal stakeholders on different hierarchical levels (i.e., top, middle, bottom) within the internal environment (i.e., structure, processes, climate, culture)
		External corporate communication	Corporate communication involving external stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, competition, society, etc.) within the external environment (i.e., macro: political, economic, societal, technological, ecological and legal; Micro: task environment)
Expertise, image and hybrid-focused corporate communication	Content of corporate communication	Expertise-focused corporate communication	Communication featuring an organization’s expertise, ability, know-how, products or services in terms of quality, utility, price or other positively presented attributes
		Image-focused corporate communication	Communication featuring an organization’s image positioning as a valuable, committed, lawful, legitimate and well-intentioned member of society
		Hybrid-focused corporate communication	Communication featuring a mixture of expertise-focused and image-focused attributes

Strategic main typology	Strategic communication focus	Strategic sub-typologies	Strategic communication focus
Information, persuasion and involvement-focused corporate communication	Objective and effect of corporate communication	Information-focused corporate communication	One-way symmetrical communication with the goal of creating awareness and giving sense to the object of communication by informing and providing facts about the content of the communication
		Persuasion-focused corporate communication	Two-way asymmetrical communication with the goal of influencing stakeholders' behavior, perception, attitude and know-how by changing the receivers' opinion or providing attractive information about the content of communication
		Involvement-focused corporate communication	Two-way symmetrical communication with the goal of engaging and/or committing the receiver to interact with the organization in a mutual interaction-based exchange of information ideally leading to win-win situations

Table 1: Overview of corporate communication strategy typologies based on the literature used in the literature review.

The above table was created by summarizing the insights from the above literature review. Firstly, the typology “Internal and external corporate communication” serves to classify and analyze corporate communication strategies in terms of the receivers of corporate communication, i.e., the stakeholders that a particular organization strives to reach (e.g., Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Cornelissen, 2014; Mitchell et al., 1997; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Secondly, the typology “expertise, image and hybrid-focused corporate communication” categorizes and evaluates corporate communication strategies in terms of the content of the respective communication (e.g., Sora Kim, 2011; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010). Finally, the typology “information, persuasion and involvement-focused corporate communication” sorts and assesses corporate communication strategies along their particular objectives (e.g., Cornelissen, 2014; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). There are important comments and distinctions to be made regarding the rationale and scope of the above typologies: Firstly, all these strategic typologies are meant to depict archetypes of corporate communication and are thus not mutually exclusive, meaning that a particular corporate communication strategy could be, for example, internal, image-focused and persuasive at the same time, depending on the sender and intended receivers, content as well as objectives of the communication strategy in question. Furthermore, a particular communication strategy might change both its focus and constitution at any given time if so decided by the performing organization (Cornelissen, 2014). Moreover, the direction of the communicative process is mainly influenced by the objectives of the communication strategy in question and may change, at any given time, due to strategic decision (Cornelissen, 2014). It is therefore not possible to exclude any type of communicative

direction for any stakeholder or content-oriented communication strategy, as, for example, stakeholders might interact with an organization via commenting on a purely informational post on an organization's social media profile. Finally, some communication channels and media are better suited for certain types of corporate communication strategies than others (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 114): While an involvement strategy is rather performed on channels that facilitate same-level, two-way interactions, such as social networks, and persuasion strategies might rather be carried out using more one-sided and promotional channels and media such as tv, offline or online advertisements, informational strategies are usually transmitted via one-sided channels and media, such as impersonal written communication in the form of financial reports. It is, however, not possible to exclude the usage of any specific channel or media in conjunction with any potential communication strategy. In this context, the internet and social media in particular have developed into multi-purpose communication channels, offering organizations the possibility to not purely disseminate information, but persuading and engaging their audiences and visitors (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 398–399).

The next chapter commences the thesis' second part of its literature review, namely the review of the concepts of strategic choice and determinism.

3.3. Strategic Choice versus Determinism

The central issue behind the concept of strategic choice versus determinism within organizational research is the question whether organizations' actions are determined on the basis of managerially and internally derived decisions and/or externally and environmentally originating circumstances (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Child, 1972; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985). For purposes of clarification, "strategic choice" and "determinism" are not theories per se, but rather two central perspectives/concepts which serve as differentiators and integrators for various other theories, such as population ecology, action theory, human ecology, systems theory, pluralism, contingency theory, strategic management, life-cycle theory, resource dependence theory, industrial economics, economic history, structural functionalism, political economy, contemporary decision theory, and others (Aldrich, 1979; Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Child, 1997; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Miller & Friesen, 1984; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2009; Whittington, 1988). In the interest of ensuring a consistent level of stringency and effectiveness with regards to this Master's Thesis' research questions and because of this thesis' focus of its theoretical scope, not all of the above-mentioned theories are analyzed in detail and thus this literature review's emphasis is placed on the most essential insights from selected theories with the goal of adequately explaining the subjects of strategic choice and determinism in the extent required and suitable for the goals of this thesis. Because both perspectives, as well as their respective corresponding theories, stand in contrast to each other, the issue of "strategic choice" versus "determinism" represents, at the same time, a central debate within organizational studies (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Whittington, 1988).

In this context, strategic choice is defined as a point of view in which an organization, because of both internal and external reasons, possesses latitude which allows it to make choices and act in its given market environment as its management sees fit without any or merely with little restrictions (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1972, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Miles et al., 1978; Whittington, 1988). On the other hand, determinism represents the completely opposite perspective in which an organization has little leeway on the marketplace and is therefore "determined" by both internal and external factors to behave in a certain way in order to economically function (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1972, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Miles et al., 1978; Whittington, 1988). Both concepts have to be seen in tandem, because, as two extremes on one continuum, they are inseparable from one another (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1972, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Miles et al., 1978; Whittington, 1988). A more practically oriented explanation for this inseparability is the fact that, no matter the organization and the environment it is acting in, there cannot be one entity which is entirely influencing its environment or being influenced by it, rather, any given

company is affecting and being affected by its environment at once (Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1983). In other words, while an organization is always determined by a number of unchangeable external factors such as laws and economic factors, or even internal factors which have been at one point created by internal and/or external influences, such as fixed hierarchical structures or business-dependent technologies, decision-makers within these organizations have, in any case, at least some degree of free will in order to formulate, plan and exercise strategic choices, ranging from the choice of (sub-)markets to enter to more efficiency and process-related modifications of business operations (Bourgeois, 1984, p. 591). However, it is true that many organizations tend to rather be more strategically choosing than deterministic and vice versa and thus it is highly unlikely that a corporation which is affected by both strategic choice and determinism in equal measure exists (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985).

Because of their respective complexities, the two concepts of “strategic choice” and “determinism” are analyzed separately before examining their interactions as two variables in the same system.

3.3.1. Strategic Choice

The concept of strategic choice in organization theory originated from analyzing the characteristics of decision-making within organizations and the groundwork was laid by Child (1972), who argued that organizations’ internal environments consisting of structures and processes are based on three main factors: the environment in which the organization functions, the technology used by the organization and the organization’s size. In this context, the final design of an organization’s internal environment is dependent on the decision of the power holders within the respective organization (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1972). Astley and van de Ven (1983, p. 249) support this argumentation by stating that latitude for decision-making can be enabled by internally configuring the organizational structure accordingly. However, Astley and van de Ven (1983) went one step further and argued that not only internal but also external circumstances which might be seen as obstacles can be shaped by power holders, for example by negotiation or lobbying, in ways that promote the organization’s assertiveness on the market. Therefore, within the concept of strategic choice, the target of a particular decisional process, whether internal (e.g., organizational structures and processes) or external (e.g., elements of the organization’s environment), is secondary to the source from where a particular strategic choice emerges (Child, 1997).

At the micro-level of analyzing individual organizations as well as their structures and processes, the concept of strategic choice is primarily based on organizational action theory, which regards the human element in organizations as the primary source of power for bringing change to structures and processes (Astley & van de Ven, 1983). Furthermore, because of its predefined freedom of will and choice of actors, strategic choice is a fundamental notion for most strategic management concepts such as competitive business strategies, resource-based strategies and corporate diversification strategies (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Barney, 1991; Porter, 1985; Rumelt, 1982). On the other hand, the macro-level perspective of strategic choice is founded on the ideas of pluralism and social ecology, which sees organizations within a specific market neither completely as rivals nor as allies, but as entities which strive towards the best outcome for their respective environment and, in doing so, are part of the same pluralistic network of organizations striving to reach their own distinct goals in separately unique, but collectively similar ways (Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Brès, Raufflet, & Boghossian, 2018; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006).

3.3.1.1. Micro Perspective of Strategic Choice

Firstly, the micro-viewpoint of strategic choice is analyzed. In the center of organizational-level strategic choice-related considerations stands the source of power which strives for the ability that enables the accomplishment of objectives, represented partly by organizations' top management (Astley & van de Ven, 1983). The word "partly" implies that strategic choice is not fully exercised solely by management, but by the informal and indirect decision-makers as well, and, together, all wielders of authority are named the "dominant coalition" (Child, 1972). According to Montanari (1978, p. 208), members of the organization which possess "some range of discretion with respect to several organizational factors including scale of operations, technology, structure, and human resources", are part of the dominant coalition. The most important aspect with regards to strategic choices planned and executed by the dominant coalition is that, whether the particular decision is made proactively or reactively and consisting of solely internal actors or a mixture of in-house and externally located actors, the decisive source behind this power always lies within the collective decision of the dominant coalition (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Sonnenstuhl, 1996; Child, 1972, 1997).

According to Child (1972, p. 16), the existence of a dominant coalition has effects on both the creation and application of strategic choice by introducing complexities related to internal political processes among all decision making participants because of their particular views and principles on organizational issues. Indeed, the multilateral nature of decisional power distribution within organizations leads to micropolitical interaction processes that preface organizational changes and other executions of strategic choices (Bacharach et al., 1996). The

underlying reasons for the existence of these types of intraorganizational negotiations and exchanges antecedent to final decisions are based on the fact that, within the respective dominant coalition, individual behaviors and reactions are dependent on others (Bacharach et al., 1996; Child, 1972). And, in these exchanges, each individual invests distinct inputs that strive to reach individual goals as part of a final collective decision, leading to this interrelated network of inputs being a party's overall understanding of action (Bacharach et al., 1996, p. 477). According to Bacharach et al. (1996, p. 478), this allows organizations to accurately track the composition of a strategic choice with regards to each decision maker's input and the resulting meaning of the decision's outcome for that particular decision-maker, meaning that the logic of action can be understood on the level of the individual.

Aggregating this logic to a subunit or group-level within organizations, the concept of strategic choice advances the view that the overall composition of structures and processes within organizations are at least partly created by the different subgroups (e.g., operations, finance, IT, communications, etc.) because of their collective action within their own spheres of influence (Weick & Roberts, 1993). The prerequisite of this concept, however, involves that the individuals' logic of action is aligned, which does not mean that all individual decision-makers have to agree with each other, but that the individual plans and objectives are compatible with each other and thus permit to be reliant on each other within a mutually feasible decisional process (Bacharach et al., 1996, p. 478).

This structurally enabled freedom of action and dynamism, coupled with a pluralistic environment (which is explored in the next chapter), further leads to the fact that, under the perspective of strategic choice, an organization may have to fulfill various contrary expectations of internal as well as external stakeholders (e.g., shareholder value maximization versus regulatory demands) and would thus have to establish and execute multiple distinct strategies (which might also be contrasting toward each other as well) at the same time (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006, p. 634). Jarzabkowski and Fenton (2006, p. 635) further argue that, when companies are influenced in such a way, they are more likely to develop internal structural fragmentation and thus the formation of subgroups and subcultures is promoted, making the mutual adjustment process described above even more relevant for carrying out reciprocally agreed-upon decisions.

Influenced by these background complexities, strategic choice may be exercised in different forms, including the specific markets and niches in which to compete as well as the strategic boundaries chosen by the dominant coalition (Child, 1972). The actual strategies employed by the dominant coalition are based on previously defined goals and configured via resource

allocations in such a way that enables the organization in question to reach the optimal outcome based on its internal and external circumstances, and ideally, to achieve sustained competitive advantages in the given market and compared to the present competitive set (Barney, 1991; Child, 1972; Porter, 1985; Wernerfelt, 1984). In other words, because of the above considerations, made possible by the assumptions of strategic choice, power-holders are able to act within a strategic management framework which enables the formulation and execution of cost leadership or differentiation-based strategies, market or product-based strategies, competitive or cooperative strategies, diversification strategies, and many more (Ansoff, 1957; Chen & Miller, 2015; Pearce, 1981; Porter, 1985; Rumelt, 1982). In case of pluralistic conditions, organizations may employ the above strategies as well as others at the same time, on the same or different markets, which would result in those particular organizations not having a clear strategic focus or employing a distinct strategic mix (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006, p. 634; Thiétart, 2005). The term “strategic choice” is thus an umbrella term which includes all kinds of top-level organizational choices that a corporation’s top management or dominant coalition can formulate, plan and execute, including a variety of strategies on the corporate level, such as market, domain and technology-related choices (Child, 1972).

In conclusion of insights gathered from strategic choice-centric literature focusing on the micro-level, organizations which are in a situation of strategic choice are likely to be characterized by the following traits: An organizational structure that allows for quicker and more effective decision making (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 249), which hints at either low levels of formalization and high levels of decentralization and/or a company culture which promotes employee empowerment. Also, strategic choice is reflected by a management team that is able to influence through their decision (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1972) hinting at a proactive and effective management. The role of an organization’s management team, as the tip of an organization’s dominant coalition, is to strive towards exercising strategic choices which match the power holders’ goals with company objectives within their respective structures as well as the entire environment wherein the organization operates. (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 249; Child, 1972). What is more, according to Bourgeois (1984, p. 591), the level of freely available (financial) resources positively influences strategic decision making by opening up possibilities to execute more comprehensive, risky and innovative endeavors that serve to exploit opportunities, which translates into higher levels of strategic choice (Bourgeois, 1984). However, greater amounts of available financing, while, in theory, would facilitate any type of change, have actually led to cases in which organizations would stop engaging in adaptive actions as responses to changing external circumstances (Hambrick & D’Aveni, 1988, p. 5). According to Hambrick and D’Aveni (1988, p. 5), this reaction pattern would lead to

management teams of affected organizations developing a mentality of “taking success for granted”, which would signal the beginning of a downward spiral of ignoring critical internal and external impulses for change. As a result, the above findings lead to the conflicting conclusion that high quantities of available financial assets not only lead to higher strategic choice but also, in some cases, to increased determinism (which is explored in the next chapter). Nevertheless, other traits that most “strategic choosers” share include the ability to change a given environment according to their internal objectives (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 249). Moreover, companies with high strategic choice are characterized by having the necessary power and resources in order to be able to influence their competition (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 340), which clearly shows a willingness of dominating the market. Furthermore, it is likely that divergent expectations of both internal and external stakeholders have to be fulfilled, which results in organizations with high of strategic choice employing multiple distinct strategies at once (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006, p. 634). According to Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985, p. 340), companies with profiles of “prospectors” (Miles et al., 1978), which are focused on identifying opportunities and thus show high levels of innovative entrepreneurial drive, are also likely to have high levels of strategic choice. As a result of the above internal conditions, companies showing high levels of strategic choice have a higher potential of reaching competitive advantages of any kind (Porter, 1985). After having explored the observational level of individual organizations, the next chapter will focus on the macro perspective of strategic choice.

3.3.1.2. Macro Perspective of Strategic Choice

The macro perspective of strategic choice is based on the theories of pluralism and social ecology, of which the main ideas are analyzed in this chapter. Firstly, the way in which strategic choice is manifested within organizations, as analyzed in the chapter above, needs to be regarded as contextually linked to the environments in which these organizations operate (Brès et al., 2018; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006). Consequently, multiple organizations which are internally set-up along their structures and processes in a way that promotes a proactive and dynamic management capable of exercising strategic choices required to fulfill corporate objectives are prerequisites for a pluralistic market situation, and thus an organization existing within a pluralistic environment ideally possess many of the characteristics promoting strategic choice (Brès et al., 2018; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006). This is due to pluralistic environments’ diversity concerning strategies, objectives and preferences of the actors embedded within them as well as their stakeholders (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006). Under these premises, the actual composition of a particular market is dependent on how effective the individual organizations manage to reach their objectives and how the execution of single

activities affect each other on the level of the entire observational set of actors within an environment (Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2007).

Therefore, the macro perspective of strategic choice does not validate strategies of individual organizations, but rather strategies as collective inputs of all organizations within a particular market targeted at the common achievement of shared objectives of an interorganizational system (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 577). Astley and Fombrun (1983, p. 577) state that this interorganizational system, which is composed of formal and/or informal relationships between various organizations, is seen as a solution to counter environmental forces affecting corporations' strategic choice by replacing the given environment with a new self-constructed environment. This, in turn, creates a common framework which allows actors within to control what is happening to and around them, but only if all actors act in a mutually confirming way and not on an individual basis that creates conflicts with the collectively feasible methods (Trist, 1977). According to Astley and Fombrun (1983, p. 578), this loose supra-organizational structure not only shields all actors within it from external shocks but also grants them a general autonomy from their potentially limiting environment which, in turn, creates higher levels of strategic choice on both an individual level and within the self-constructed sphere of organizational influence. These networks among organizations might thus lead to situations in which, on the micro-level, separate organizations might stand in competition and therefore use strategic choice in order to exploit competitive advantages, but, on the macro-level, these same organizations might choose to interact in order to shape the environment towards collective prosperity (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, pp. 249–251; Brès et al., 2018; Porter, 1985). As an example for organizationally ecological systems which would result in the situation described above, Trist (1977) mentions industry-specific unions, such as agricultural unions. It is important to note, however, that no formal agreements or structures between particular actors within a market have to be in place in order for such networks of organizational ecology to function and that shared points of connection such as interests, values or technology can suffice (Trist, 1977, p. 172). Aside from voluntarily cooperating at the macro-level, individual organizations might also choose to enter a collective sphere because they are forced to do so by their respective environments (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, pp. 579–580): As markets grow, competition becomes fiercer and stakeholders, customers as well as organizations become more interlinked and dependent on each other, the effect on individual organizations is that they have to deal with increased complexities while doing business. And, as managers of individual organizations might become overwhelmed by this development, various inefficiencies influencing organizations' performances could manifest (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, pp. 579–580). Therefore, actors within highly interdependent environments, where linkages and relationships between the individual organizations and various other third parties

including stakeholders are seen as detrimental because of competitive pressures or administrative inefficiencies, might see the establishment of a cooperative sphere as a viable solution which would not only increase individual performances, but also improve the overall effectiveness and value generation as well as minimalization of inefficiencies for stakeholders within specific markets as a whole (Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Chen & Miller, 2015).

Astley and Fombrun (1983, pp. 580–581) have developed a classificational framework for collective organizational action based on research from the field of bioecology which categorizes common spheres of organizational behavior based on two main dimensions: Firstly, the form of interdependence of the observed actors, which can either be based on “commensalism” or “symbiosis”. In this context, Astley and Fombrun (1983, p. 578) define “commensalism” as a relationship between entities which are similar and “symbiosis” as relationships between entities which are different. The second categorizing dimension is based on whether the respective entities interact with each other directly or indirectly (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 580). This framework is illustrated in table 2.

Type of association	Forms of interdependence	
	Commensalistic	Symbiotic
Direct	Confederate	Conjugate
Indirect	Agglomerate	Organic

Table 2: A classification of collectives (reconstruction based on Astley and Fombrun (1983, p. 580))

The two dimensions “type of association” consisting of direct and indirect associations and “forms of interdependence” consisting of communalistic and symbiotic interdependences/relationships result in the following four organizational collectives: Confederate, conjugate, agglomerate and organic collectives (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 580). These are explored in more detail:

The confederate collective includes organizations which are similar to each other and that work with each other in a direct way in order to reach a common goal (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 580). Such supra-organizational constructs tend to be found in highly concentrated and established sectors with high entry barriers (Porter, 1985) where direct communication is possible because of the low number of total actors (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, pp. 582–583). A concrete example for a confederate collective could be a major strategic alliance between two

organizations of the same industry, such as the alliance between the automotive corporations Renault and Nissan (Segrestin, 2005).

A conjugate collective denotes a relationship between two organizations which are not similar but which have a direct way of collaborating because the members perform supportive functions for each other (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 580). Here, the primary motive for collaboration is not necessarily the desire to occupy a larger portion of the market, but the need or desire for externally located (i.e., not in the same industry) know-how and/or business functions, resulting in interindustry cooperations of one or more firms (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, pp. 583–584). Conjugate collective are usually formalized, which means that the scope of actors' collaborative actions are clearly defined, for example by means of a joint venture (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 584). A concrete example for conjugate collectives is the joint venture of the global conglomerates Siemens and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, named "Primetals Technologies", an international engineering company headquartered in London, which has been created in order to combine two core functions of the two owner organizations (Chatterton, 2016).

Agglomerate collectives are networks of relationships spanning multiple similar organizations which keep contact because of their desire to reach common goals, however, these actors do not directly collaborate with each other, but rely on overlying collectivist standards and rules (such as pricing and quality standards) to guarantee the achievement of mutual goals (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 580). These types of collectives are found in environments of (near) perfect competition where a multitude of market actors are able to compete with each other on the same market with the same resources as well as products or services (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, pp. 581–582). While it is true that strategic choice is more difficult to execute under these hostile conditions (especially as an individual organization), on a macro-level, it is possible for a large enough group of actors to enforce their decisions against environmental constraints by employing collective strategies which follow the notion of mutual prosperity (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 582; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 340). Because of the large number of actors within agglomerate collectives, the difficulty of coordinating the processes within them is arguably higher, and, therefore, besides formalization through agreements, a centralized entity, tasked with coordination of the collective, needs to be set up (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 582). As an example for agglomerate collectives, Astley and Fombrun (1983, p. 582) mention unions within the agriculture and retail industries.

Lastly, organic collectives are composed of dissimilar organizations which have no direct contact when it comes to their cooperative behavior, but are members of the same

interorganizational and interindustry web of relationships which have at least some form of a functionally-oriented denominator (Aldrich, 1979; Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 581). When it comes to the size and scope of such networks, there is no given theoretical limit, as, on the greatest possible scale, functional relationships could be traced through the entire global economy as seemingly unrelated industries could affect each other in highly complex and obscure ways, resulting in undefinable superstructures (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, pp. 584–585). The coordination of organic collectives is based on the individual functional influences between their members, with those organizations that perform the most specialist or rare functions also having the highest levels of strategic choice within the collective sphere (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 585). Due to the reasons stated above, out of all possible collectivistic constructs presented, the organic collective is arguably the most pluralistic and thus the most difficult one to define.

In conclusion of the insights gathered from strategic choice-centric literature focusing on the macro-level, environments which are in a situation of strategic choice are likely to be characterized by the following traits: High degrees of dynamism represented by frequent market-related changes and advanced technological innovations as well as unusually high entrepreneurial ventures in certain markets are signs of maximum strategic choice (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 340). However, organizations engaging in hostile actions tend to dampen strategic choice on a population-wide level (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 340). Moreover, an environment that is relatively easy to change by lobbying or negotiations is another indication of strategic choice taking effect (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 249). However, because of the broad applications of strategic choice as a perspective upon which most of the field of strategic management is based, virtually every possible environment has the potential to reach high levels of strategic choice (Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984).

In conclusion, the environmental point of view of strategic choice represents the argument that a given market environment can be changed by specific inputs of individual or collective market players (Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1997). Environments or organizations which seem highly determined by their respective contexts, might change as a result of strategies which originate from human combinations (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Barney, 1991; Bourgeois, 1984; Child, 1997; Miles et al., 1978; Porter, 1985). An example for this fact can be seen in the current disruptive trends that are forecasted to completely change the automotive industry (Gao, Kaas, Mohr, & Wee, 2016). The next chapter introduces the opposite perspective to strategic choice, determinism.

3.3.2. Determinism

Following a deterministic point of view, the importance of managers for the overall strategic direction and performance of organizations is quite reduced and subordinate to, firstly, environmental and/or market-related forces such as natural selection, technological change, general shifts in the state of the economy, customer demand, industry structures, market-related rules and regulations, etc., and, secondly, internally originating factors such as company size, quality of employees, available resources, etc. (Aldrich, 1979; Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985). Therefore, under this perspective of reduced managerial discretion, management is consigned to a more or less symbolic role whose actions have little to no effect on any organizational outcome in terms of economic performance because of the above-mentioned environmental constraints (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2009). Therefore, the deterministic approach sees organizational action as overwhelmingly decided by immutable external forces surrounding a particular organization's management, and, despite the fact that opportunities within the environment can be identified and exploited, these opportunities are seen as already given circumstances which cannot, in any form, be influenced by management with regards to their creation or existence (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 576). Furthermore, Astley and Fombrun (1983, p. 576) state that, in a deterministic setting, the maximum possible level of strategic choice of management would be to react to the given environmental inputs by firstly, being optimally prepared to identify any such external opportunities as precisely as possible and, following that, extracting and transforming the newly acquired information in a way that best supports the organization in reaching their goals. Consequently, deterministic organizations that wish to survive or thrive must focus on matching their controllable variables as accurately as possible with their uncontrollable and unpredictable environments (Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Drazin & van Ven, 1985; Miles & Snow, 1984).

The theoretical framework of the concept of determinism largely follows two established theories within organizational research: On the micro-level, i.e., the viewpoint of individual organizations, determinism is heavily based on contingency theory which focuses on the adaptation of organizational characteristics to respective internal and external contingences, and, on the macro-level, i.e., the viewpoint of entire markets/industries containing individual organizations, determinism is mainly influenced by the theory of population ecology which uses an evolutionary approach to organizational change inspired by the ecological concepts of Darwin represented by a population-level perspective of organizations (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Drazin & van Ven, 1985; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Miles & Snow, 1984; Young, 1988).

3.3.2.1. Micro Perspective of Determinism

Similar to its counterpart described in the previous chapter, determinism has applications on both the way that organizations act on the inside as well as with the environment in which they exist (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, pp. 248–250). Therefore, before being able to observe multiple organizations from the environmental point of view as a population, it is necessary to understand the reasons for their behaviors on the micro scale (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977). One of the theoretical frameworks of this scale of observation, the contingency theory of organizations, states that organizations can only survive and function if they possess a certain “fit” between their internal structure, systems, processes as well as other relevant elements and their respective internal and external environments (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Drazin & van Ven, 1985; Miles & Snow, 1984). Consequently, this leaves little leeway for managers within deterministic organizations that wish to exist in a given market to perform strategic choices based on their free will and basically puts contextual and environmental forces in the sole position of forming all relevant internal corporate variables (Bourgeois, 1984; Drazin & van Ven, 1985). As a result, a deterministic company is usually characterized by a high degree of formalization and structural rigidity which forces employees to behave according to a predetermined set of rules (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 248; Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 930). This high level of internal stringency and bureaucracy results from deterministic companies’ necessity of adopting a reactive stance towards changes in the market environment and thus strictly internalizing relevant and essential inputs (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 248). Therefore, the internal design, structure and processes of an organization are shaped by its environment and any managerial scope of action is seen as the force behind implementing, but not dictating, the required organization-environment fit (Bourgeois, 1984; Miles & Snow, 1984). Another theory based on the notions of determinism, the organizational life cycle theory, regards the entire evolution of organizations as determined by various external and internal factors which shape organizations’ structures, processes and strategies (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Starting with the contingency theory, relevant theoretical insights of determinism are explored.

According to the contingency theory and its concept of “organizational fit”, the process of fitting the organization into its environment strives to adjust the respective organization and all its related aspects in the most optimal way to its environment by implementing certain strategies which shape internal structures and processes accordingly (Miles & Snow, 1984, p. 11). Therefore, according to Astley and van de Ven (1983, pp. 248–250), under a micro-level perspective of determinism, managers of deterministic companies focus on identifying relevant pieces of external information which are then used to modify certain elements in the organization’s structure and processes in order to continue existing and performing on the

market. This suits the argumentation of Lenz (1981), who states that fixed internal structures showing high degrees of formalization and rigidity lead to companies focusing on resolving internal inefficiencies and improving efficiencies. This process of performing internal changes to organizations' structural and process-related designs as reaction to certain environmental inputs matches the above described concept of "strategic fit" (Miles & Snow, 1984; Zajac, Kraatz, & Bresser, 2000). In this context, the respective deterministic company desires the most optimal organization-to-environment fit possible, namely tight fit, as opposed to minimal fit (Miles & Snow, 1984): Whereas minimal fit allows a company to exist and continue its operations while providing a sufficient level of performance for an unspecified, but certainly not permanent amount of time, tight fit results in corporate excellence, providing the best possible performance and returns over the longest possible period of time (Miles & Snow, 1984, pp. 14–16). However, Zajac et al. (2000) argue that organizational fit can only be judged by observing certain organizations over long periods of time and that true strategic fit is only attainable by companies that are dynamic enough to identify all environmental changes and internally incorporate them in a way that exploits each change to the maximum possible extent.

On an individual organization's level of observation, the following deterministic internal factors which, firstly, dictate its choices as well as behavior and, secondly, prevent managers from carrying out adaptive measures in order to reach an acceptable level of organizational fit, are presented (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 931): Previous substantial investments in corporate assets which are not transferable to other parts of the organization or have resulted in sunk costs, and thus possibly resulting in path dependency if reinforced by subsequent actions and processes which would lead to a so-called "organizational lock-in", which denotes a situation afflicted by a highly limited choice set (Barnes, Gartland, & Stack, 2004; Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009); Rigid and inefficient organizational processes and structures leading to flawed, blocked or intentionally manipulated flows of information within the company; Intra-organizational political conflicts between individuals or groups possessing enough authority to slow down or block intended and/or required changes; Contextual constraints resulting from binding normative agreements within the company which have resulted in certain norms and standards and thus make changes difficult or impossible. In this respect, it is each organization's goal to overcome these possible internal constraints and improve any business-related internal configurational elements in order to achieve the best fit with the respective environment (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Miles & Snow, 1984). Aside from tight and minimal fit, another established typology of organizational-environmental fitness is the classification between generalist and specialist organizations (Carroll, 1985): While generalist organizations are able to function in multiple different environments at the same time because of their flexibility and excess capacity of resources, specialist organizations are restricted to a more

defined dimension and thus lesser absolute number of environments. Furthermore, according to Hannan and Freeman (1977, p. 958), specialist organizations perform better in stable environments with clear resource demands and constraints while generalists are better suited to surviving in unstable and changing environments. However, in especially dynamic environments with high rates of external changes, specialists might still have better chances for survival because generalists are focusing all their capacities on constantly adapting to changing environments which could lead to a waste of essential resources and thus to organizational death, while specialists concentrate on performing their core business activities which allows them to “weather the storm” of frequent market-wide changes and ultimately survive (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 958). In conclusion, the concept of “organizational fit” within contingency theory adequately explains the characteristics and variables of determinism on an individual organizational level at one given point in time and/or one specific organization-environment combination. However, in order to provide a holistic and chronological interpretation of determinism on the micro-level, insights from the organizational life cycle theory are presented (Miller & Friesen, 1984).

Miller and Friesen (1984, p. 1161) developed and tested the corporate life cycle theory in order to increase the understanding of relationships between different strategies, structures and environments of companies over time. This theory states that organizations follow certain predictable strategic structural and process-based patterns called “life cycle phases”, categorized by certain arrangements of underlying challenges or issues over the entire period of their existence (Drazin & Kazanjian, 1990, p. 319). The fundamental causes of these issues are internal and/or external factors that determine the specific situation and path of situations of the organization in question. Miller and Friesen (1984, p. 1163) categorized these factors, which vary according to the specific life cycle stage, into the following dimensions: “Situation” (i.e., the organization’s external environment), “organization” (i.e., the organization’s internal environment) and “innovation and strategy” (i.e., the organization’s observable strategies and resulting aspects). In order to explore the organizational life cycle theory, the proposed five life cycle phases by Miller and Friesen (1984, p. 1163), which are called the birth, growth, maturity, revival and decline phases, are presented in detail: Firstly, the birth phase denotes an organization which is relatively young and has an undeveloped, centralized and informal structure, employing a niche strategy within an environment where competitors are similar to each other. Secondly, the growth phase is characterized by the observed company being older and medium-sized, possessing partly formalized and less centralized structures, having shareholders, being in a more competitive and heterogenous environment and employing a broader strategic scope (Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1163). Next, in the maturity phase, the organization has grown larger and is characterized by a more complex ownership structure,

which possesses increased levels of formalization and departmentalization within its organizational structures. Its environment has become more competitive, its strategic mix is largely consolidated within a clearly defined market and the organizational growth has slowed down (Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1163). Following that, the revival phase denotes the situation in which the respective company regains traction and accelerates its growth one last time because of the execution of diversification strategies that include new and unrelated products and/or markets (Ansoff, 1957; Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1163). As a consequence, the organization in the revival phase features even more complex structures characterized by high formalization and high levels of bureaucracy and, because the company has entered new markets, its environment has become even more heterogenous and dynamic (Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1163). The last phase, the decline phase, describes an organization which has consolidated its products/services and market presence and is thus located within a more stable and homogenous environment. Organizational growth has stagnated and begins steadily declining while the previously formalized and bureaucratic structure is still intact and thus becomes more difficult to maintain as the company is heading to the end of its life cycle (Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1163). It is important to note that Miller and Friesen (1984, p. 1177) add that the individual life cycle phases are not bound to any specific order which means that a company in the birth phase could potentially directly transition into the decline phase if certain deterministic factors are given. In conclusion, the life-cycle theory, while not assuming extreme determinism at all times, follows the notion that whatever strategic choice a young company has at the beginning of its life cycle is minimized over time and ultimately eliminated at the end of its life cycle by various deterministic factors caused by previous decisions (Lester & Parnell, 2008; Miller & Friesen, 1984). The grounds for this notion lie in the concept of path dependency, which, in this case, means that any strategic choice that a specific organization executes leads to the creation of contingencies which ultimately determine the further existence of the observed company within a specific life cycle stage (Barnes et al., 2004; Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1177). This does not mean that any level of strategic choice that the company previously held is automatically nullified, but that it is lowered by the newly materialized deterministic factors of the specific life cycle stage and that, with any additional strategic choices that are carried out, the overall ability of the organization to do so is further minimized, until determinism has surpassed strategic choice on the organization's continuum (Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1177). However, Lester and Parnell (2008, p. 542) acknowledge that this process is not set in stone by arguing that the existence of "revival phases" is precipitated by not only the existence, but at least temporary rise in strategic choice levels. The above elaboration further proves the theoretical influence of determinism on both the life-cycle theory and contingency theory and highlights their conceptual interrelationships.

Scholarly criticism of determinism includes notions of superficiality and limitations regarding some of the concepts' hypotheses, such as the reduced role of managers, arguing that, if managers roles' were indeed as insignificant to organizational/industry performance and development, then any necessity for their existence would be nullified (Bourgeois, 1984, p. 589). Another point of critique lies in the concept's unclear definition of organizations' different levels of survivability and effectiveness, which translates into ambiguities concerning the prerequisites and effects of corporate success conditions such as profitability, resource efficiency, employee satisfaction, societal welfare effects, etc. (Tosi & Slocum, 1984, p. 12). Furthermore, the concepts' deterministic system based on clear limitations implies a general predictability of strategies as these are reduced to mere reactions to external inputs, which contradicts the very nature of strategies that are often times successful precisely because they are unpredictable to the competition and a given environment (and are created by managers' ability to transform and combine given information and opportunities) (Bourgeois, 1984, p. 589). What is more, this would also nullify large parts of already established and proven strategic management concepts (Bourgeois, 1984, p. 586). Moreover, concerning organizations' internal scope of design and environmental compositions, Tosi and Slocum (1984, pp. 14–15) argue that deterministic approaches merely take into account the overall state of organizations' structural characteristics while ignoring the possibility of deviations (flexible or inflexible structures) in various subsystems such as marketing or R&D as responses to externally varied sources of influence, such as different financial conditions of banks or governmental subsidies.

In conclusion of insights gathered from determinism-centric literature focused on the micro-level, high levels of determinism are mostly found in organizations showing the following characteristics: A higher likelihood of encountering difficulties with regards to changing internal structures to appropriately counter extraordinary external changes due to ineffective or passive management and/or an accordingly rigid company structure (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 248; Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 957). This does not mean, however, that deterministic companies are not able change at all, but rather that any internally-guided changes that indeed happen are geared at fulfilling the minimal external requirements in order to continue economically and that major transformations are more dependent on the possibilities offered by the corporate environment rather the corporation's own potential for change (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, pp. 339–340). Furthermore, Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985, pp. 339–340) argue that reliance on internal resources alone is usually insufficient to gain a competitive advantage and therefore competitive parity is common among deterministic companies (Porter, 1985). The next chapter focuses on the population-wide perspective of determinism.

3.3.2.2. Macro Perspective of Determinism

The macro-level viewpoint of determinism, which draws its conceptual foundation from the theory of the population ecology, elevates and expands the scale of analysis to entire populations of organizations (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Young, 1988). In this context, the core element which defines a population are “classes of organizations which are relatively homogenous in terms of environmental vulnerability” (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 934). In order to define these “classes of organizations” which together constitute a given population, Hannan and Freeman (1977, pp. 935–936) present organizations’ so-called blueprints, consisting of formal structures, sectors and fields of business as well as business practices and, secondly, systems which are represented by geographical, political, industry and product-related limitations. Young (1988, p. 4) interprets this definition by Hannan and Freeman as industry classifications based on distinctions such as the type of common products or services, the constitution and use of resources such as labor, energy, technology or raw materials, the formal connections within an industry, the forms of organizational ownership and legal structures, and others. Therefore, while a population can certainly be regarded as being represented by a certain industry, it is an abstraction which deviates from real-life classifications and can thus be changed to the objectives of the respective analysis (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Levinthal, 1991). Thus, each population differs from one another regarding their demands on their respective participants, leading to one optimal organizational form for each particular environment that all organizations within that particular population strive to achieve, making all organizations of one population in turn similar when it comes to their internal structures, and, subsequently, culminating in an isomorphic constitution of individual populations, their participants and their reciprocal relationships (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 253; Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 939). Consequently, this situation leads to contextual and environmental limitations of organizations’ freedom of action enforced by market entry and exit barriers which make movement between markets/populations difficult or near impossible, especially for highly deterministic businesses (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Porter, 1985).

In order to further explore possible limitations that lead to the existence of separate and distinct markets as well as the isomorphic nature of populations, Hannan and Freeman (1977, p. 932) present several deterministic factors which can be found on the environmental level: Governmentally-induced entry and exit barriers consisting of laws, regulations, standards and/or competitive power imbalances due to state-backed companies or monopolies; External influences on the flow of vital information to certain market participants leading to informational asymmetries among competitors; Legitimacy-related influences and barriers emanating from external third parties which have generated enough non-governmental authority to substantially influence other competitors/market participants; The notion of the “general

equilibrium” of competitive markets which states that, if one market participant has found a competitive advantage or solution to inefficiencies, all other market participants might follow, leading to the previous advantage ceasing to be one and thus leading to competitive parity or inefficiencies (because of, amongst others, the fact that one solution is not suitable to everyone). Furthermore, other effects resulting from competition, such as rival organizations possessing the ability to create superior resource combinations and/or accumulate greater amounts of occupied resources resulting in substantial market share imbalances, especially in a population which possess a limited amount of resources to begin with, will increase the rate and power of natural selection, the population’s maximum capacity of organizations and, in turn, the isomorphism of a given population (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, pp. 940–941).

However, exceptions in the short term might occur when especially large organizations enter new markets, as the presence of a new participant with a substantial market power might actually promote variety within that specific population because of the large newcomer’s population-spanning sphere of activity and influence (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 946). Nevertheless, isomorphic conditions of populations lead to the creation of environmentally dictated niches into which organizations have to fit according to ideal organizational benchmark forms and, aside from this rule, no existence on any given market for organizations with insufficient market profile matches is possible (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 250). According to Hannan and Freeman (1977, p. 940), those organizations which succeed in overcoming possible environmental limitations while simultaneously improving their internal-external fit survive in a given population and those companies which fail are eliminated by their respective environments. However, the process of improving the “organization-environment fit” requires internal changes to existing structures and processes and thus might result in organizations increasing or decreasing in size, which, in turn, could create organizational differences as profound as to warrant the existence of entirely new organizations (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Miles & Snow, 1984). Therefore, from a population perspective, the “organizational fit” process might result in individual organizations either disappearing and/or (re-)appearing in other populations as new participants (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 938).

Taking a mega-perspective spanning multiple populations, the (co-)existence of several populations is explored. According to Hannan and Freeman (1977, pp. 942–943), different populations are able to coexist without any kind of interference as long as none of the populations in question require one or more environmental resources that another population needs for the existence of its embedded organizations. In case that two different populations do require access to the same resource(s) with the effect of capturing the same niche(s), the

result is the same as in the similar situation of two competitors on the same market: In the long term, the population which is better suited to seizing the resource(s) in question will survive while the more unfit population will cease to exist in that particular form (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 943). Consequently, populations may increase or decrease in size as resource necessities lead to a change in external constraints on individual populations and internal constraints change the number of organizations within the respective populations (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 944). Within this supra-populational development, smaller independent populations with low constraints, such as highly specialized and young niches are assimilated either partly or completely into greater populations because their loosely defined constraints become more complex and strict, which, in turn, might lead to a standardization of constraints and elimination of idiosyncrasies of individual populations on the level of the entire environment (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 944). As an example for this theoretical development leading to the overall decrease in environmental diversity, one could mention the constant technological assimilation of all industries, especially in administration and support related organizational functions since the beginning of the global economy and the technological advancement. Contrary to this first possibility of development, another alternative scenario might be that of increased total diversity of the environment: Because already established and structured populations, which have high levels and complexities of constraints, encounter other populations, the overall result is an expansion of the already existing advanced constraints within the respective population (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, p. 944). As an example for both possible scenarios presented, Hannan and Freeman (1977, p. 945) mention the increasing role of states for their respective economies because of interventions in the forms of, for example, labor or safety laws, which lead to either loosely constrained populations becoming more complex and thus standardized or already heavily constrained populations increasing their already high environmental and internal constraints, thereby creating higher diversity within the respective populations.

In conclusion of insights gathered from determinism-centric literature focused on the macro-level, high levels of determinism are mostly found in environments characterized by the following circumstances: established industries that show high levels of stability (because of either legal, economic or political restraints), where market actors compete using standardized products and services with low or average levels of technology and survival is only possible by meticulously fitting into the stringently defined environment (Bourgeois, 1984; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 339).

Finally, the concept of determinism favors the view of an ever-powerful market environment which is exceptionally difficult to influence and thus limits individual organizations to choices

that conform with the prevailing environmentally established rules and guidelines. At the same time, management is reduced to a passive and/or reactive role which consists of inactive observation and adaptation of company structures as responses to ever-changing business surroundings (Astley & van de Ven, 1983, p. 250). At a macro-level, single organizations' actions are inconsequential, as determinism regards any effects originating from the global state of politics, history, society and the economy as the sole elements determining the future of entire populations (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 577).

Now that both concepts have been analyzed separately as two opposites on one continuum, a connected and also more complex view of strategic choice and determinism introduced by Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985) is explored.

3.3.3. A Connected and Expanded View of Strategic Choice and Determinism

Before the scholarly work of Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985), the predominant literature on the topic held the view that strategic choice and determinism were two opposites on one continuum (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1972). However, Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985) argue that the two variables exist in a more independent way to each other and thus can be placed on two different continua, resulting in a matrix containing the four main states of natural selection, differentiation, strategic choice and undifferentiated choice. These conditions are categorized within four quadrants and are outlined in figure 6.

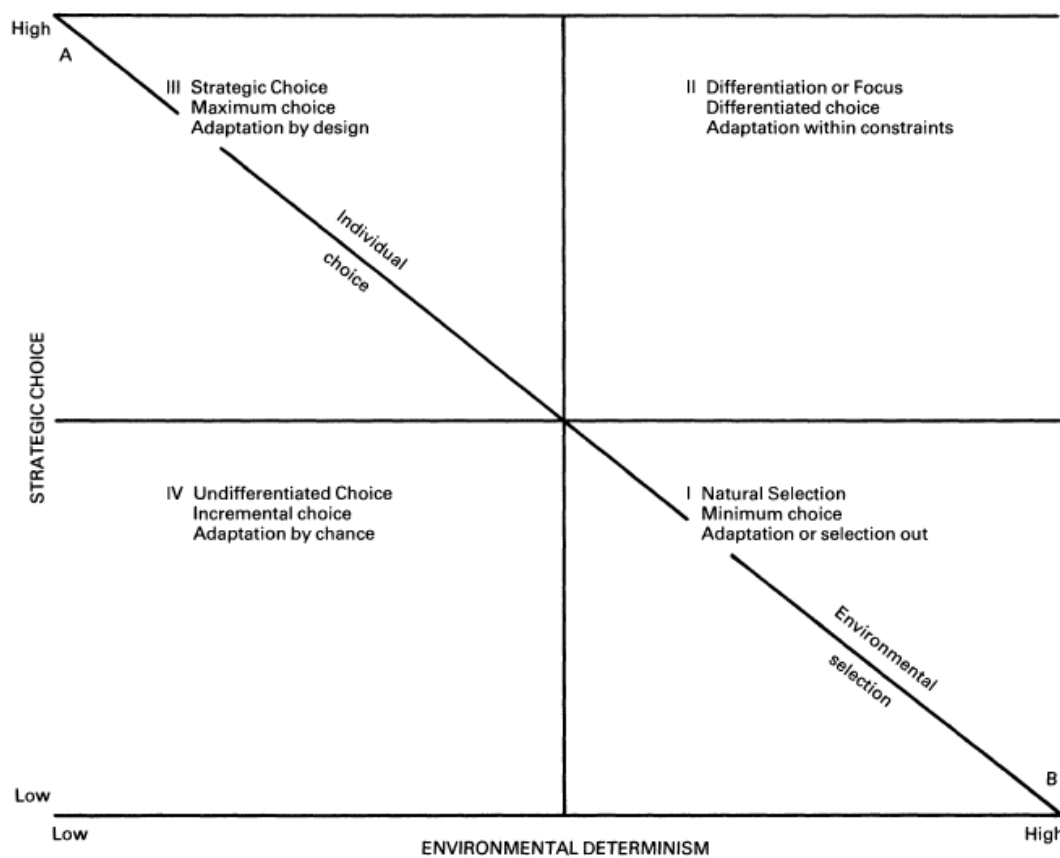


Figure 6: “Relation of strategic choices and environmental determinism in organizational adaptation” (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 339)

Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985, pp. 338–346) describe quadrant 1 as a situation of low strategic choice and high determinism, matching the original definition of maximum determinism (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1997; Whittington, 1988), where organizations have no control over external factors and the market is the only deciding factor when it comes to organizational choices, forcing all participants in this situation to either adapt or be eliminated. An example of a situation characterized by natural selection consists of companies operating in a market affected by perfect competition in which relatively small market players mostly sell simple and standardized products (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 339) resulting in a market with low entry

barriers, competitive parity and cost leadership strategies (Porter, 1985). Another example is that of heavily specialized niches, in which all companies are exposed to highly formal and informal barriers (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 339).

The total opposite is quadrant 3, which is dominated by high strategic choice and features low to no levels of determinism, resulting in a situation of maximum strategic choice (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1972, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Miles et al., 1978; Whittington, 1988). Due to high freedom of agency enabled by strategic choice and its prerequisites (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985), organizations situated in this quadrant possess the ability to easily traverse industries and any potential entry or exit barriers (Porter, 1985). Furthermore, environmental characteristics favour types of organizations labelled as “prospectors”, which strategically focus on R&D, achieving high levels of innovativeness and generally searching for opportunities and exploiting them (Miles et al., 1978).

A situation in which both strategic choice and determinism feature high levels is illustrated by quadrant 2. While, at first, this situation may seem contradictory due to the concepts' definitions, one must consider a situation where constraints are so high that only a small number of organizations are able to exist, resulting in high determinism, but, due to the low quantity of eligible firms, these same firms have ample room for maneuverability within their heavily restricted area of operations, resulting in high strategic choice (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 341). As an example for such situations, Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985, p. 341) mention niches where quality, capital or performance requirements are very high and market actors that fulfill all requirements have the necessary resources and power in order to fully exploit competitive advantages by following specific focus or differentiation strategies (Porter, 1985). Moreover, companies following multi-niche or conglomerate diversification strategies also fall into this category, especially in such cases where certain business units of such organizations are exposed to different contextual and environmental constraints than the superordinate corporate structures (Ansoff & McDonnell, 1988; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 341).

Lastly, quadrant 4 delineates a situation characterized by low levels of both strategic choice and determinism, which means that, although external constraints are low and thus nothing would stand in the way of high freedom of agency, the organization in question is still not able to act on the implied high levels of strategic choice (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 342). This unexpected corporate behavior can be explained by internal company-related issues such as aversion, inability or inaction caused by, for example, principal-agency problems (Ross, 1973). Another explanation might also lie in a mismatch between organizational capabilities and external opportunities which results in affected companies' passiveness or non-utilization of

options, notwithstanding any potentially favourable characteristics of the respective organizations' market environments (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985, p. 342). Examples of such organizations include so-called "reactors", which are market participants whose actions primarily consist of maintaining the status quo and who only engage in change processes if faced with no other viable alternatives (Miles et al., 1978).

In conclusion, Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985) present a multi-faceted and integrated matrix of organizational adaptation between strategic choice and determinism which enhances insights and promotes the understanding of exceptional situations that remain unclear within the traditional view of strategic choice versus determinism. Nevertheless, this thesis' empirical part shall use the widely accepted understanding of strategic choice and determinism as a continuum as it provides a more suitable basis for comparing and identifying correlations with corporate communication strategies due to this thesis' data and methodology-related limitations.

The next chapter concludes the second part of this Master Thesis' literature review and introduces a continuum model of strategic choice and determinism based on the reviewed literature, serving as both a summary of the most relevant findings of the literature it is based upon, and, a part of the theoretical framework upon which the subsequent empirical part is built.

3.3.4. The Continuum of Strategic Choice and Determinism

In order to provide a better visualization and understanding of the insights analyzed in the last chapters on strategic choice versus determinism, the conceptualization of strategic choice versus determinism as a continuum is presented in the model illustrated by figure 7. Furthermore, the understandings gathered by the reviewed literature about micro and macro-level perspectives of the respective concepts are added to the model in the form of comprehensible reinforcing factors for either determinism or strategic choice. The content of the model is detailed in the following paragraphs:

The continuum features “maximum strategic choice” as one extreme position on the left side and “maximum determinism” as the contrasting state on the right side (the exact location of the extremes were not chosen deliberately because this circumstance is irrelevant for the validity of the model). As mentioned in the literature review, maximum strategic choice describes a situation where an organization and/or its dominant coalition (on the micro-scale) or a market as a collection of individual actors (on the macro-scale) has/have the necessary power to plan, decide and carry out the kinds of (strategic) choices it/they wish(es) to without any or low levels of constraints or limitations from external/environmental sources (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1997). As for the other extreme, maximum determinism denotes the state where individual companies’ management (on the micro-scale) and populations of organizations (on the macro-scale) are severely limited in the application of their (strategic) choices in the extent that any action is heteronomous and thus dictated by the respective external/environmental forces (e.g. Bourgeois, 1984; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985).

In the space above the illustrated continuum, organizational factors/characteristics/attributes which promote either determinism or strategic choice on the micro-level, are listed. Likewise, below the continuum, market-related factors are shown which favor either strategic choice or determinism on the macro-level. Thus, in theory, by adding an organization’s or a market’s specific factors together, the final position of the observed object will be located at a certain position on the continuum (the exact grading and scoring model including the individual factors’ weights lie at the discretion of this model’s practitioner). The aforementioned factors which have been identified from the analyzed sources of the literature review are now explored in more detail.

The following organizational and/or managerial factors or circumstances promote strategic choice on the micro-level: A high level of innovation and/or innovative drive within a particular

company (e.g. Miles et al., 1978); An organizational structure which allows for dynamic actions and processes (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983) and which features high levels of decentralization as well as fragmentation into different departments and/or functional areas of expertise (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006); A proactive management that is constantly striving to create profitable resource combinations leading to competitive advantages (e.g. Child, 1972; Miles et al., 1978); A management that possesses enough discretion to plan, decide and execute strategic choices based on their particular objectives and desires (e.g. Child, 1972; Montanari, 1978); An appropriate level of freely available (financial) resources which allows management to carry out strategic choices, also called “organizational slack” or “slack resources” (e.g. Bourgeois, 1984; Child, 1972); The existence of competitive advantages in companies is also an indication of those particular companies being “strategic choosers” and, at the same time, it increases the likelihood that those companies remain in this state of agency (e.g. Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985); The more strategically diverse an organization is, i.e., the more distinct strategies it employs, the higher its level of strategic choice (e.g. Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006).

In contrast, the following factors or conditions presented in the illustrated continuum model favoring the existence of determinism within managerial teams or organizations, are explored: Previous decisions which may have led to sunk costs and/or caused a certain path dependency which has become critical for the further survival of the respective company, going insofar as to cause organizational lock-ins (e.g. Barnes et al., 2004; Sydow et al., 2009); An organizational structure which features high inertia and rigidity, leading to inefficiencies regarding organizational processes of any kind (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977); Internal organizational environments which show high levels of formalization, resulting in employees and processes having to follow firm rules and having to minimize possible deviations from planned behavior (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977); An organizational evolution according to pre-defined paths and which cannot be significantly changed by the organization itself, such as the “life cycles” stated in the respective chapters above (Miller & Friesen, 1984); A management team that is not outwardly market focused (e.g., in order to identify opportunities), but rather focused on identifying internal inefficiencies with the goal of resolving them or improving efficiencies (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Lenz, 1981); Reduced levels of managerial discretion and/or a management that is constrained in their choices and actions (e.g. Aldrich, 1979; Bourgeois, 1984) which may result in a management team whose only role is a symbolic one (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2009); A company which, because of its resource combinations, shows competitive parity, i.e., it has no notable features which would result in an above-average performance compared to competitors, which might even lead to a state of non-competitiveness (e.g. Astley & Fombrun,

1983); A management team which does not proactively seek to create favorable situations on the market, but rather behaves in an adaptive, reactive or even passive way as reaction to external market inputs (e.g. Drazin & van Ven, 1985; Miles & Snow, 1984); Management teams which constantly change internal variables of their respective organizations as responses to external market inputs, thereby seeking to achieve the best possible “organizational fit” with the respective environment (e.g. Miles & Snow, 1984; Zajac et al., 2000); Organizations which have difficulty in leaving their current markets and/or accessing other markets (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983).

When it comes to factors which increase strategic choice on a population-wide or macro-level, some of the market-related identified attributes or circumstances from the literature review include: A dynamic, fast-paced and/or innovative market environment (e.g. Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985); An environment which is populated by organizations having divergent interests, objectives and ways of doing business (e.g. Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006) An environment which is benign to the actors within it, allowing them to have some levels of agency in order to self-determinedly plan and execute strategic choices (e.g. Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985); The existence of certain associations and interdependences between entities within the respective environment (Astley & Fombrun, 1983) or, at the very least, shared points of interests between them (Trist, 1977) which lead to the formation of collective objectives (e.g. Astley & Fombrun, 1983); The more modifiable (by individual actors or a collective) a certain environment is, the higher the overall level of strategic choice of that particular market (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983); The shared desire by an appropriate number of organizations within a particular market to defend against environmental forces which threaten their existence (individually and collectively) (e.g. Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Chen & Miller, 2015).

Finally, market-wide determinism is favored by the following occurrences and/or factors: The level of hostility encountered within an industry is positively correlated with determinism (e.g. Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985); Environmental isomorphism, leading to market actors becoming more alike as well as promoting the standardization of products and services within markets (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977); Regulations, which might be caused by governments and/or other influential parties, have deterministic effects on the market(s) they exist in (e.g. Hannan & Freeman, 1977) and result in environmental stability which further acts as a driver of determinism (e.g. Bourgeois, 1984; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985); High market entry and exit barriers, which act as defenses for the deterministic sphere of the respective environment and hinder any sort of change (e.g. Astley & van de Ven, 1983); Power imbalances between actors within their respective environment, which allow for the creation of rules/regulations, as well as possibly existing information asymmetries which further enable

such situations (e.g. Hannan & Freeman, 1977); A high level of natural selection due to the aforementioned deterministic factors (which are further secured by stringent market rules) coupled with the appropriate mechanisms for market equilibration which strengthen the environment's deterministic nature and nullifies or reverts any occurring changes (e.g. Hannan & Freeman, 1977).

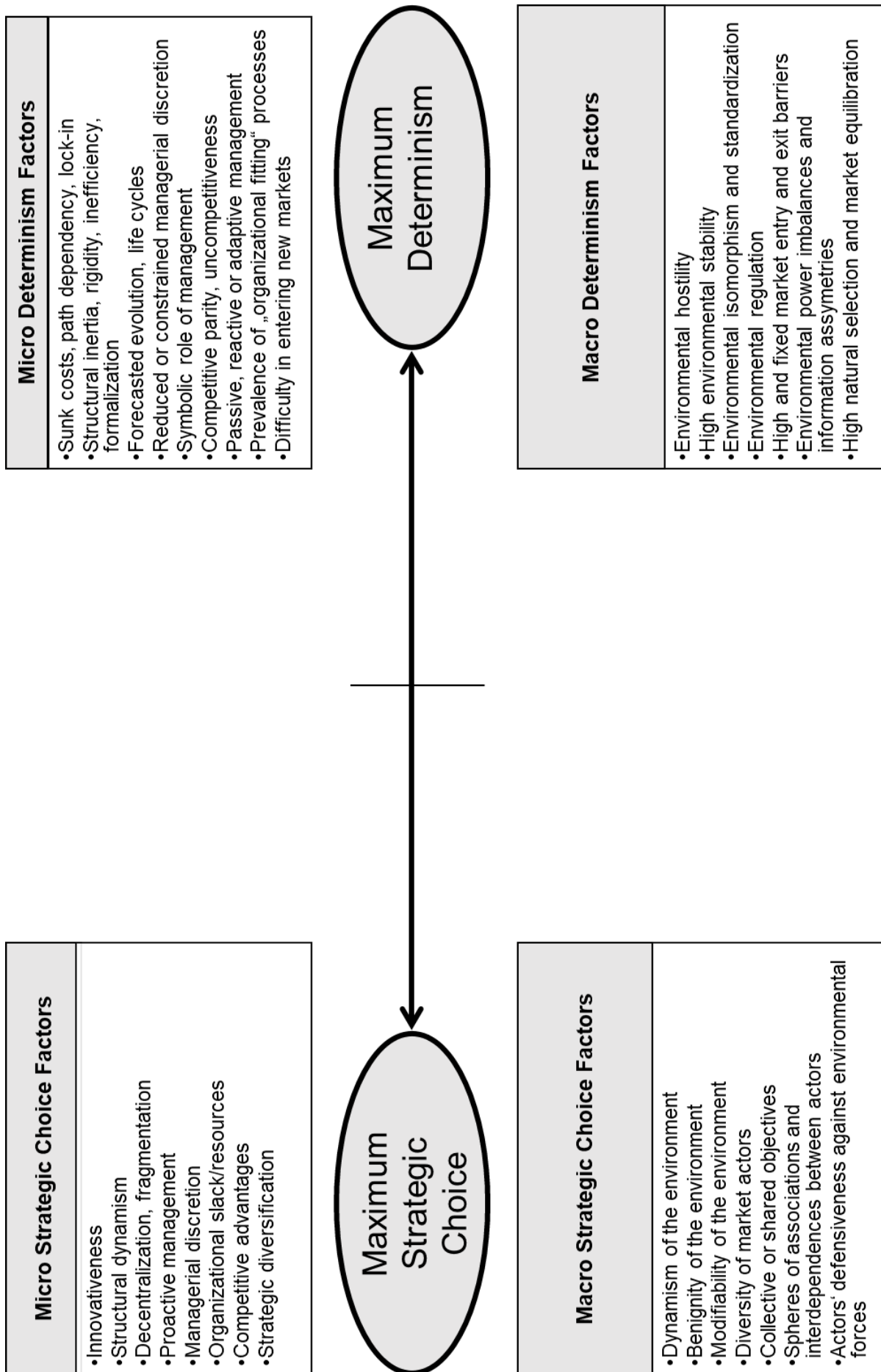


Figure 7: The strategic choice – determinism continuum based on the reviewed literature

4. Research Design & Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology of this Master Thesis' empirical part. Firstly, the research method itself is explained. Subsequently, the population, the resulting sample and its method of selection as well as relevant characteristics are indicated. Finally, the data collection and analysis process as well as all corresponding elements are explained.

4.1. Research Method

The research method of this thesis is based on content analysis, which is one of the most established techniques for performing research in the field of social sciences and particularly used for analyzing (corporate) communication (Krippendorff, 2008; McMillan, 2000). Krippendorff (2008, p. 18) defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”. Moreover, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 156), content analysis is “is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables”. Krippendorff (2008, pp. 40–43) mentions the following unique features of content analysis compared to other methods found in social sciences (i.e., controlled experiments, interviews, questionnaires, statistical analyses, etc.): Unobtrusiveness, which means that the observed data is not in any way altered by the researcher or the process of research; Ability to manage and use unstructured inputs as relevant data, which means that researchers employing content analysis use already created data from third sources in its original form; Context sensitivity, which translates to the fact that content analysis accepts and incorporates the context of each unit of analyzed data instead of cutting data out of its context in order to observe it separately. Inspired by the five steps of content analysis by McMillan (2000, pp. 81–82), the next chapters elaborate on the sample and its selection process as well as the intricacies of the data collection and analysis process.

4.2. Population and Sample

The population consists of organizations which are actively doing business in Austria. The headquarter of the company may be outside of Austria. Out of this population, the sample includes 25 organizations. The following criteria were used in order to select the sample: Firstly, the selected organizations had to be part of the top 500 Austrian corporations in terms of revenue. Secondly, the population was reduced to 100 out of the 500 companies by only considering those featured in the interdisciplinary research project “CREATING COMPETITIVENESS - ERFOLGREICH IN EINER GLOBALISIERTEN, DIGITALEN WELT” (in

English: Creating Competitiveness – successful in a globalized and digital world), which was carried out at the Johannes Kepler University of Linz by Reisinger, Lehner, Strehl, Deifel, and Gumpoldsberger (2017). Finally, out of the reduced population, 25 corporations remained in the sample via the following selection method: Each corporation in the list of candidates was marked by a specific number ranging from 1 to 100. And, via a random number generator set between the values 1 and 100, 25 corporations were selected.

4.2.1. Overview of selected Corporations

This sub-chapter provides an overview of the 25 selected and analyzed companies:

Corporations
Atos SE
Austro Holding GmbH
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG
Doppler Group
Fronius International GmbH
Gebrüder Haider Group
Greiner AG
Hartlauer Handels GmbH
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.
Kellner & Kunz AG
Kelly GmbH
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH
Lisec Holding GmbH
Melecs Holding GmbH
Miele & Cie. KG
Österreichische Post AG
Palfinger AG
Red Bull GmbH
Samsung Group
Spitz S. GmbH
Starlinger & Co GmbH
Trenkwalder International AG
T-Systems MMS GmbH
Voestalpine AG
Welser Profile Austria GmbH

Table 3: Overview of selected corporations

4.3. Data Collection and Analysis

This chapter accurately outlines the relevant elements of the data collection and analysis process, consisting of the chosen channels and their relevant contents as well as the relevant indicators used in the content analysis. The data collection and analysis process has been optimized in order to fulfill one this thesis' research objectives, which is, amongst others, to accurately portray corporations' entire digital corporate communication strategies and not merely functional aspects or parts thereof. The entire data collection and analysis process was carried out from August 31st until September 12th, 2019.

4.3.1. Units of Data Collection and Analysis

This subchapter lists all data sources relevant for the empirical part of this thesis. In this context, the following terms which denote channels and objects used for data collection and analysis are essential (McMillan, 2000, p. 82): The so-called "coding units" represent the smallest pieces of content that are collected and analyzed while "context units" are the higher-ranking vessels in which the coding units exist. In this case, "context units" are either websites or social media profiles (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or LinkedIn company profiles). And, "coding units" are represented by elements within the aforementioned context units, such as posts, videos, pictures, texts, etc. The relevant websites and social media profiles as well as their coding units are explored in the following chapters.

4.3.1.1. Context Units: Websites

The first type of context units used for data collection and analysis consists of corporate websites of the respective companies from the sample.

Corporations	Websites
Atos SE	https://atos.net/en/
Austro Holding GmbH	https://austro-holding.at/
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	https://www.rotax.com/en/start.html
Doppler Group	https://www.doppler.at/
Fronius International GmbH	https://www.fronius.com/en
Gebrüder Haider Group	https://www.gebr-haider.at/de
Greiner AG	https://www.greiner.com/en/group/
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	https://www.hartlauer.at/
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	https://www.hogast.at/
Kellner & Kunz AG	https://www.reca.co.at/en.html
Kelly GmbH	https://www.kellys.at/
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	https://www.kremsmueller.com/en/

Corporations	Websites
Lisec Holding GmbH	https://www.lisec.com/de/
Melecs Holding GmbH	https://www.Melecs.com
Miele & Cie. KG	https://www.miele.com/en/com/index.htm
Österreichische Post AG	https://www.post.at
Palfinger AG	https://www.palfinger.com/en-us
Red Bull GmbH	https://www.redbull.com/us-en/
Samsung Group	https://www.samsung.com/us/
Spitz S. GmbH	https://www.spitz.at/en.html
Starlinger & Co GmbH	https://www.starlinger.com/en/
Trenkwalder International AG	https://group.trenkwalder.com/en
T-Systems MMS GmbH	https://www.t-systems.com/
Voestalpine AG	https://www.voestalpine.com/group/en/
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	https://www.welser.com/en

Table 4: Overview of selected corporations' websites

4.3.1.2. Website Coding Units

The data collection process specifically focused on front pages or home pages of the respective websites. Consequently, during the data collection and analysis process, no other menu on a particular website was accessed and solely the content displayed on the front page of a website, which is the first page that a potential visitor accesses, was designated as the context unit of analysis of corporate communication strategies. In this context, the individual coding units were, among others, represented by the following elements: Corresponding pieces of text, previews of menus, videos, images, slideshows, etc. The scope of the coding unit analysis was limited to 10 elements per website. However, because most websites' front pages featured more than ten individual elements/coding units, the relevant ones were determined on the basis of their prominence compared to other elements as well as the heterogeneousness between different individual elements. Consequently, for example, although a slideshow might have featured multiple videos or images, if the individual images/videos were related to each other, the slideshow was seen as one coding unit, and, likewise, if any images/videos within the slideshow were unlike each other, the individual images/videos were regarded as separate coding units. Furthermore, the focus was set on analyzing international/English versions of websites (exceptions to this can be seen in the table above). Finally, solely the versions at the time of the particular website accesses, which happened between August 31st and September 12th, 2019, were relevant. The above methodology has been optimized on the grounds of this thesis' research objective of accurately portraying corporations' entire digital corporate communication strategies.

4.3.1.3. Context Units: Social Media

Regarding social media channels as context units for data collection and analysis, only official and verified corporate Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter profiles were selected for the purpose of analyzing corporate communication strategies. In case that specific companies did not possess verified social media profiles (marked by a blue hook symbol next to the social media profile name), those that appeared to be the official ones (e.g., link to company website, legitimate content, proper conduct and professionalism by the particular profiles, etc.) were chosen. Social media profiles/channels based on specific brands, products or departments of the respective companies were excluded. If a company used localized and/or market-based social media profiles, all officially localized versions and market-based profiles fulfilling the relevancy requirements also counted as context units. Regarding analysis and data collection on LinkedIn, modifications to the above selection criteria have been made because of the social media platform's unique positioning, design and functionality as a "professional social network". Again, the above methodology has been created with the central notion of accurately portraying corporations' entire digital corporate communication strategies in mind.

The following table lists the chosen social media profiles per company in the sample:

Corporations	Facebook profiles	Instagram profiles	Twitter profiles	LinkedIn profiles
Atos SE	Atos	atosglobal	Atos	Atos
Austro Holding GmbH	-	-	-	-
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	BRP-Rotax	brprotax	BRP-Rotax	-
Doppler Group	-	-	-	-
Fronius International GmbH	Fronius Perfect Welding, Fronius Perfect Welding Middle East	froniusbrasil, fronuswelding	Fronius Int. Welding, Fronius Solar Spain, Fronius UK Welding, FRONIUS FRANCE, Fronius USA Solar	Fronius International GmbH
Gebrüder Haider Group	Freunde von Gebrüder Haider Bauunternehmung GmbH	-	-	-
Greiner AG	Greiner AG	greinerag	Greiner AG	Greiner AG
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	Hartlauer	-	-	-
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	hogastjob.com, HOGAST	_hogast_	-	HOGAST
Kellner & Kunz AG	Kellner & Kunz AG	reca_bewegt	-	-

Corporations	Facebook profiles	Instagram profiles	Twitter profiles	LinkedIn profiles
Kelly GmbH	Kelly's	-	-	-
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	Kremsmüller Industrieanlagenbau	-	Kremsmueller	-
Lisec Holding GmbH	LISEC	-	-	Lisec Austria GmbH
Melecs Holding GmbH	Melecs EWS GmbH	Melecs_gyor	-	-
Miele & Cie. KG	Miele	miele_com	Miele & Cie. KG, Miele Professional	Miele
Österreichische Post AG	Österreichische Post AG	unserepost	-	Österreichische Post AG
Palfinger AG	Palfinger	palfingerag	-	PALFINGER Group
Red Bull GmbH	Red Bull	redbull	Red Bull	Red Bull
Samsung Group	Samsung	samsungindia, samsungespana, samsungchile	Samsung Chile, Samsung Indonesia, Samsung Brasil, Samsung, Samsung South Africa	Samsung Electronics
Spitz S. GmbH	Spitz	spitz_at	-	S. Spitz GmbH
Starlinger & Co GmbH	Starlinger	-	Starlinger	Starlinger & Co.
Trenkwalder International AG	Trenkwalder Austria, Trenkwalder Deutschland	trenkwalder_deutschland, trenkwalder_austria,	Trenkwalder	Trenkwalder Group, Trenkwalder Personaldienstleistungen GmbH
T-Systems MMS GmbH	T-Systems Austria, T-Systems, T-Systems North America, T-Systems Multimedia Solutions	tsystems_mms	T-Systems DE	T-Systems International GmbH
Voestalpine AG	voestalpine	voestalpine	voestalpine	voestalpine
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	Welser Profile	welser_profile		Welser Profile

Table 5: Overview of selected corporations' analyzed social media profiles

4.3.1.4. Social Media Coding Units

The period of observation is not limited to any specific time period; however, in order to guarantee the topicality of this Master's Thesis, especially considering the fast-paced and quickly changing nature of digital communication, a focus was placed on posts not older than 30 days since the date of analysis (e.g. Sora Kim et al., 2014; Lo, Waters, & Christensen, 2017). However, a certain post might have been older than 30 days if the latest interaction (e.g., comments, likes, shares, etc.) with that respective post happened within the last 30 days since the date of observation. Furthermore, the scope of observation was limited to a maximum number of 10 posts per social media context unit. These ten posts were determined by the number of interactions with platform users (i.e., likes, comments, etc.), which means that only the top 10 posts of each corporation's top social media profile (per social media platform) in terms of interactions within the period of observation were analyzed. It should be pointed out that a "post" was understood as either a link or a video/image in conjunction with a corresponding text or solely text itself if the post is made up purely of written information. In this context, cross-platform posts or shares (such as YouTube videos shared on Twitter) also counted as posts. In some cases, which are explained in the subchapters following chapter 4.3.2., comments by users as responses to certain posts were also relevant. In cases where specific social media context units featured less than ten posts and interactions with posts within the chronological focus of observation of 30 days since the date of analysis, the number of analyzed content units was less than ten. In the interest of ensuring both an efficient and high-quality research process, data analysis and collection on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter was carried out using the social media monitoring and analysis software "Storyclash" (for further information, visit <https://www.storyclash.com/>). Due to the lack of appropriate software-driven solutions for analyzing LinkedIn, context units on that particular digital channel have been analyzed without the use of dedicated social media software. Potential implications and limitations resulting from this choice in research tools are discussed in the chapter "Discussion", however, any risk of any quality deviation resulting from this circumstance is deemed to be very low. The following subchapters define the exact context and coding units as well as relevant details for each social media platform separately.

4.3.1.4.a Facebook

Facebook profiles as context units were selected based on the following criteria: Firstly, the respective profiles had to be verified and official corporate Facebook profiles. In case that specific companies did not possess verified social media profiles those described in chapter 4.3.1.4. were chosen instead. Furthermore, in cases where corporations used a multitude of localized profile versions based on the respective target markets of their profiles, this Master's Thesis used an aggregated version (compiled using the social media monitoring software

“Storyclash”) containing all localized profiles as context units. The following Facebook interactions were relevant in terms of selecting and ranking content units on FB: All interactions consisting of shares, comments, likes and the emoji reactions “Love”, “Haha”, “Wow”, “Sad” and “Angry” as well as platform interactions such as URL shares to other websites. These same criteria applied to all kinds of content units found on Facebook, such as videos originating from YouTube or direct links. FB interactions were measured and ranked with Storyclash.

4.3.1.4.b Instagram

Instagram profiles as context units were selected based on the following criteria: Firstly, the respective profiles had to be verified official corporate Instagram profiles. In case that specific companies did not possess verified social media profiles those described in chapter 4.3.1.4. were chosen instead. Furthermore, although Instagram does not permit the usage of localized versions of the same account as Facebook does, virtually the same situation exists on Instagram in the form of different kinds of Instagram channels (such as @samsungindia or @samsungchile). Therefore, for content analysis on Instagram, all relevant corporate channels were seen as context units. The following Instagram interactions were relevant in terms of selecting and ranking content units on Instagram: Instagram comments and likes as well as platform interactions such as URL shares on other websites. These same criteria applied to all kinds of content units found on Instagram, such as videos originating from YouTube or direct links. Using Storyclash, all official and relevant Instagram channels of the analyzed companies were compiled, and their post interactions were ranked in order to be further analyzed.

4.3.1.4.c Twitter

Twitter profiles as context units were selected based on the following criteria: Firstly, the respective profiles had to be verified official corporate Twitter profiles. In case that specific companies did not possess verified social media profiles those described in chapter 4.3.1.4. were chosen instead. Furthermore, while Twitter does not permit the usage of localized versions of the same account as Facebook does, the same situation exists on Twitter in the form of different kinds channels (such as Samsung Brasil or Samsung Chile). Therefore, for content analysis on Twitter, all relevant channels were seen as context units. The following Twitter interactions were relevant in terms of selecting and ranking content units on Twitter: Twitter retweets, comments and likes as well as platform interactions such as URL shares on other websites. These same criteria applied to all kinds of content units found on Twitter, such as videos originating from YouTube or direct links. Using Storyclash, all official and relevant Twitter channels of the analyzed companies were compiled, and their post interactions were ranked in order to be further analyzed.

4.3.1.4.d LinkedIn

LinkedIn profiles as context units were selected based on the following criteria: Firstly, the respective profiles had to be official corporate LinkedIn profiles. Because of LinkedIn's contextual differences compared to other social networks, which mainly arise because of its design and functioning as a "professional social network", all corporate accounts were deemed to be official. Furthermore, this circumstance might have resulted in situations where one corporation had unusually high numbers of quasi-relevant LinkedIn profiles based on specific products, departments, markets or other focus areas generating highly targeted and specific content. Therefore, in order to comply with the methodological framework of this thesis' content analysis, which has been optimized for analyzing corporations' entire digital corporate communication strategies on relevant social media channels as well as websites, only LinkedIn profiles representing the corporation as a whole (not departments, markets or products) ranked by the number of LinkedIn followers have been regarded as context units. Moreover, the following LinkedIn interactions were relevant in terms of selecting and ranking content units on Twitter: LinkedIn comments, likes, reactions as well as platform interactions such as URL shares on other websites. LinkedIn context units have been analyzed without the use of software, as no suitable tools have been found for this purpose. Nevertheless, the maximum amount of effort possible has been put into minimizing possible research quality deviations, making this matter a negligible formality of this thesis' research (This circumstance is further discussed in chapter "Discussion").

4.3.2. Content Analysis Indicators and Evaluation Methodology

This chapter accurately outlines the relevant indicators which were used for identifying and analyzing corporate communication strategies as well as portrayed states of strategic choice or determinism on the basis of the previously mentioned context and coding units during the data analysis process. Furthermore, concerning the evaluation methodology of the indicators with regard to their corresponding strategies and states of latitude (i.e., strategic choice and determinism), content analysis has been done separately and simultaneously for all three communication strategy typologies as well as assignments to states of strategic choice and determinism, because all three strategies and the states of freedom of action are not mutually exclusive and can exist simultaneously within a given coding unit.

Firstly, the evaluation methodology of websites is described: After defining 10 coding units within a website's front page, evaluation was carried out at the level of the individual coding units. On the level of the coding unit, solely the dominating indicator of a particular communication strategy and its strategic choice/determinism integration defined the coding

unit's final result in each of the analyzed dimensions. Afterwards, these evaluations were summed up, resulting in the evaluation of the context unit, the website. Consequently, distributions of respective companies' strategy typologies as well as distribution of strategic choice and determinism representations and underlying indicators were generated.

Secondly, the same approach is explained for social media context units: The first evaluation was also done at the level of the coding unit, with the one predominant indication per strategy typology and state of strategic choice/determinism observed within the coding unit having been the chosen strategy and/or state of latitude for that particular coding unit. After having carried out this method for each coding unit up to the maximum number of ten coding units per social media context unit, the individual results per coding unit were aggregated and the overall result per context unit was thus determined. As in the approach above, the distribution of all relevant sub-results and indicators were calculated for all companies' social media profiles.

Thirdly, overall evaluations of corporate communication strategies containing results for each strategic typology and influences of strategic and determinism as well as all observed indicators were calculated for each analyzed company. The last step was to aggregate the results of context unit evaluations, resulting in the final assessment for each analyzed corporation's entire digital communication strategy as well as final interpretations derived from digital communication regarding corporations' position on the strategic choice – determinism continuum.

Finally, a correlation analysis aimed at creating hypotheses describing differences concerning digital communication strategies between companies showing high levels of strategic choice versus those that are deterministic was carried out.

The next chapters precisely describe all indicators used to analyze corporate communication strategies as well as representations of strategic choice and determinism.

4.3.2.1. Stakeholder-based Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

Stakeholder-based corporate communication strategy indicators have been established in order identify the stakeholder groups targeted by the corporate communication. Based on the insights from the literature review, the differentiation between internal and external corporate communication strategy indicators has been applied.

4.3.2.1.a Internal Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

In order to identify the existence of internal corporate communication strategies as well as targeted stakeholder groups, the following target indicators were established for an internal stakeholder group inspired by previous research (e.g. Sora Kim et al., 2014), illustrated by the table below.

Internal stakeholder group	Indicators
Employees	Content showing employees or company-related events; Explicitly addressing existing employees

Table 6: Internal stakeholder group and its respective indicators

4.3.2.1.a External Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

With the objective of identifying the existence of external corporate communication strategies as well as targeted stakeholder groups, target indicators were established for 8 external stakeholder groups, partly inspired by previous research (e.g. Sora Kim et al., 2014), illustrated by the table below.

External stakeholder group	Indicators
Shareholders	Company-related financial information, company stock data, information on services for investors
Customers	Content highlighting products, services, (limited) offers, discounts
Communities	Content based on a specific region and/or interest
Governments	Content regarding compliance with laws (e.g., labor, trade, health laws)
NGOs/activists	Environmental protection, philanthropy, equality-specific content
Potential employees	Job postings, career-related event invitations, information regarding working at the respective company, testimonials by existing employees, information regarding career opportunities and employee development
Potential new partners	Announcements regarding new opportunities; Explicitly stating the desire for identifying new cooperation partners; Highlighting possible synergies between the company in question and potential partners
External stakeholders	Indicator used to describe communication directed at three or more stakeholder groups or at multiple unspecifiable groups. Occurs if analyzed coding units feature a mix of all indicators specified above.

Table 7: External stakeholder groups and their respective indicators

4.3.2.1. Content-based Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

This chapter provides an overview of the indicators used to identify the type of content-based corporate communication strategy within encountered coding units. Based on the strategies' operational definitions mentioned in the literature review, various indicators were developed on the basis of the method used by Sora Kim and Rader (2010, p. 67).

4.3.2.1.a Expertise Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

For the purpose of identifying expertise corporate communication strategies, the following indicators based on Sora Kim and Rader (2010, p. 67), which are illustrated in table 8, were defined and used for analyzing the different coding units.

Expertise corporate communication strategy indicators
Content showing a company's expertise in product or service quality and/or performance
Content explicitly focusing on products or services
Content showing a company's local, national or global success
Content showing a company's quality control program
Content showing a company's leadership within markets or industries
Content showing a company's market orientation
Content showing a company's innovation and R&D efforts
Content showing a company's current or past projects or presenting case studies
Content showing a company's references
Content providing other information or news and announcements about the company

Table 8: Expertise corporate communication strategy indicators

4.3.2.1.b Image Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

In the interest of identifying image corporate communication strategies, the following indicators based on Sora Kim and Rader (2010, p. 67), which are illustrated in table 9, were defined and used for analyzing the different coding units.

Image corporate communication strategy indicators
Content showing a company's environmental stewardship and sustainability initiatives/programs
Content showing a company's philanthropic contribution
Content showing a company's educational commitments
Content showing a company's employee involvement, opportunities and development as well as related initiatives
Content showing a company's public health commitments
Content showing a company's sponsorship and/or involvement of/in cultural activities, sports /entertainment/professional events, etc.
Content providing entertainment value

Image corporate communication strategy indicators
Content featuring famous personalities which, e.g., promote causes or discuss topics in conjunction with the company targeted at certain stakeholder groups
Content dealing with currently popular or controversial topics in the respective company's industry

Table 9: Image corporate communication strategy indicators

4.3.2.1.c Hybrid Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

A hybrid corporate communication strategy was only deemed existent in the case of particular coding or context unit having a proportion of exactly 50% expertise and 50% image-based indicators.

4.3.2.1. Objective-based Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

This chapter provides an overview of the indicators used to identify objective-based corporate communication strategies. Again, various indicators for each particular objective-based corporate communication strategy have been developed based on the literature review, particularly based on insights gathered from Morsing and Schultz (2006) and Cornelissen (2014).

4.3.2.1.a Informational Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

With the aim of outlining all indicators relevant for identifying an informational corporate communication strategy among the presented coding units, the following table has been developed on the basis of insights gathered from Morsing and Schultz (2006) and Cornelissen (2014).

Informational corporate communication strategy indicators
Content showing facts, numbers and figures without using any particular format or structure
Content showing proof of portrayed corporate actions and/or showing reliable and verified sources for any potentially portrayed claim
Content which does not intend to generate reactions from their viewers and strives to solely inform
Content not featuring explicitly persuasive, prompting or (self-)promotional elements and is thus aimed at providing purely informational value from an objective or close to objective perspective to recipients
Content representing announcements which strive to solely inform potential stakeholders
Content presented in the form of reports, press releases or memos

Table 10: Informational corporate communication strategy indicators

4.3.2.1.b Persuasive Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

For the purpose of outlining all indicators relevant for identifying a persuasive corporate communication strategy amongst the presented coding units, the following table has been developed on the basis of insights gathered from Morsing and Schultz (2006) and Cornelissen (2014).

Persuasive corporate communication strategy indicators
Content featuring explicitly prompting elements resulting in concrete offers to potential stakeholders, such as links to webshops, sale announcements or the direct promotion of a particular product or service using individual elements of texts (e.g., messages or slogans), images, videos or a combination thereof
Content omitting verified proof of portrayed corporate actions and/or not providing reliable and verified sources for any potentially portrayed claim
Content presented in the form of self-promotional posts, such as advertisements, testimonials or promotional reports
Promotional content intending to generate company-benefitting reactions from their viewers (e.g., a favorable opinion of the company) and/or which actively encourages recipients to perform certain actions benefitting the company (e.g., buying products/services)

Table 11: Persuasive corporate communication strategy indicators

4.3.2.1.c Involvement Corporate Communication Strategy Indicators

In order to outline all indicators relevant for identifying an involvement corporate communication strategy amongst the presented coding units, the following table has been developed on the basis of insights gathered from Morsing and Schultz (2006) and Cornelissen (2014).

Involvement corporate communication strategy indicators
Content featuring explicit elements that prompt viewers to respond, such as invitations to competitions, job postings, quizzes, events or controversial/interesting discussions
Content which features dialogues between the company and involved stakeholders or the intention of creating dialogues by the company (in the form of, e.g., comments and mutual answers by the company and the stakeholder or a company directly addressing stakeholders)
Content not focusing on its informational content, but rather intending to generate answers of any kind from their viewers (e.g., any kind of attention-seeking content)

Table 12: Involvement corporate communication strategy indicators

4.3.2.2. Strategic Choice and Determinism Indicators

This chapter provides an overview of the indicators used to interpret relevant content as displays of strategic choice or determinism. The indicators for strategic choice and determinism have been developed on the basis of insights gathered in the literature review and summarized/illustrated in the strategic choice-determinism continuum presented in figure 7.

4.3.2.2.a Strategic Choice Indicators

The following table lists all content-related indicators which signal the status of strategic choice as opposed to determinism. The table has been developed on the basis of all relevant insights from the literature review.

Strategic Choice indicators
Content depicting competitive advantages of the company and/or the creation of competitive advantages for its clients through its added value
Content showing high levels of innovation through R&D activities or product/service innovations that exceed incremental innovations (i.e., more than improvements to existing products), resulting in illustrations of substantial or disruptive innovations (Jansen, van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2006)
Content showing a corporation's ability to traverse entry barriers by entering new markets/industries or showing an already significant presence on multiple markets/industries
Content showing a corporation's willingness, ability and/or flexibility to execute both internal and external substantial strategic changes and initiatives (e.g., changes in top management, changes in the organizational structure, flat hierarchies, boundary-spanning employee discretion, major acquisitions, market entries, repositioning, changes in business strategy, etc.)
Content displaying a corporation's ability and power to modify or change its environment through its choices and actions
Content proving the existence of slack resources or financial slack in the company (i.e., freely available resources used for a number of value-adding actions, such as investments in other companies but also sponsorships for relevant (industry-related) events)
Content showing the respective company as being a leading actor in its relevant market(s), segment(s), niche(s) or industry/industries

Table 13: Strategic choice indicators

4.3.2.2.b Determinism Indicators

The table below lists all content-related indicators which signal the status determinism as opposed to strategic choice. The table has been developed on the basis of all relevant insights from the literature review.

Determinism indicators
Content depicting competitive parity or non-competitiveness of the corporation in question, its performance, products and/or services
Content indicating incremental, low or no levels of innovation concerning the company itself, its products, its services and/or all other company-related topics

Determinism indicators
Content showing the respective corporation's inability to override entry barriers into potential new markets
Content displaying a corporation's dependence, modifiableness, adaptation, reaction and/or passivity to environmentally caused occurrences
Content exhibiting an internal structure (or parts thereof) which show(s) certain degrees of rigidity (e.g., because of path dependency, formalization, high levels of bureaucracy, standardization, etc.
Content showing a company's efforts or discussions regarding solving existing problems/inefficiencies and increasing efficiencies
Content showing companies' products or services which are already known or existing

Table 14: Determinism indicators

4.3.3. Illustrative Example

In order to promote a better understanding of the methodology used in this empirical part, an illustrative example is shown. This example features the execution of the previously defined content analysis on a selected coding unit, which is presented in figure 8. The approach displayed here is representative of any other coding unit analyses undertaken in the context of this Master's Thesis.



Figure 8: Coding unit example

The coding unit displayed in figure 8, which fulfills all relevant criteria described in the chapters above (i.e., it was present on a relevant context unit, its interactions were numerous enough and its latest date of interaction was, at the time of observation, less than 30 days ago) is analyzed along the following dimensions and options: Stakeholder-based communication strategy (internal or external), content-based communication strategy (expertise, image or hybrid), objective-based communication strategy (informational, persuasive or involvement-based) and portrayed status of power (strategic choice or determinism). Using the indicators defined in chapter 4.3.2., the analysis of the coding unit shown in figure 8 is carried out in the following way: Concerning the targeted stakeholders, this coding unit features an external

communication strategy specifically targeted at customers. This is due to the shown products and the presented competition to win these products. Next, the content is clearly signaling the prevalence of an expertise-based communication strategy predicated on the display of Samsung's products, which are, in this case, GalaxyFit smartwatches. Thirdly, regarding the objective of this communication, this coding unit clearly employs an involvement communication strategy because it invites the stakeholders (i.e., the (potential) customers) to participate in a competition to win the displayed products and therefore the corporation directly interacts with its stakeholders. Finally, concerning the coding unit's inclination to either strategic choice or determinism, a deterministic stance can be observed. This is mainly the case since the shown content features already existing products which cannot be seen as innovative at this time (i.e., smartwatches) and, furthermore, a competition is a widely used tool in marketing. In conclusion, the coding unit illustrated in figure 8 shows an external, expertise and involvement-based communication strategy which transmits the status of determinism in the name of the corporation in question.

All coding units of the respective companies' context units were evaluated in the manner described above. After having been aggregated, all relevant coding units within all context units led to results for both the context level as well as entire corporations' digital strategies.

5. Results

This chapter features the results of this Master Thesis' empirical part. Firstly, the analyzed coding units are listed in order to provide a general overview of the scale of research. Secondly, results concerning communication strategies are displayed at the level of entire corporations as well as individually analyzed context units. Thirdly, results with regards to strategic choice and determinism impressions are also shown using a combined as well as separate view of analyzed context units while also displaying results in the form of the strategic choice-determinism continuum. It must be noted that the focus of this chapter is to mainly visualize results, not interpret them by finding correlations and establishing possible hypotheses. Any possible relevant differences and/or correlations between results or other intricacies regarding the figures displayed in this chapter, which may or may not lead to hypotheses, are discussed in the next chapter, "Discussion".

5.1. Distribution of Coding Units

The following table provides the respective quantities of analyzed coding units per context unit as well as the total amount of coding units.

Corporations	Number of analyzed Coding Units					
	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	Website	All
Atos SE	10	10	10	10	10	50
Austro Holding GmbH	0	0	0	0	10	10
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	10	6	10	0	5	31
Doppler Group	0	0	0	0	10	10
Fronius International GmbH	10	10	10	2	10	42
Gebrüder Haider Group	1	0	0	0	8	9
Greiner AG	10	10	10	10	9	49
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	10	0	0	0	10	20
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	10	9	0	8	10	37
Kellner & Kunz AG	10	10	0	0	10	30
Kelly GmbH	10	0	0	0	10	20
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	10	0	3	0	9	22
Lisec Holding GmbH	10	0	0	10	10	30
Melecs Holding GmbH	7	4	0	0	6	17
Miele & Cie. KG	10	10	10	6	7	43
Österreichische Post AG	10	10	0	10	9	39
Palfinger AG	10	10	0	10	7	37
Red Bull GmbH	10	10	10	8	10	48
Samsung Group	10	10	10	10	10	50
Spitz S. GmbH	10	10	0	1	8	29
Starlinger & Co GmbH	2	0	4	7	10	23

Corporations	Number of analyzed Coding Units					
Trenkwalder International AG	10	10	1	10	9	40
T-Systems MMS GmbH	10	10	10	10	10	50
Voestalpine AG	9	10	10	10	7	46
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	10	1	0	10	10	31
All	209	150	98	132	224	813

Table 15: Enumeration of analyzed coding units per corporation

In sum, 813 coding units have been analyzed. As established within the research methodology, the maximum possible number of coding units per context unit is 10 and thus a corporation could, at most, feature 50 analyzed coding units. Any deviation from this maximum number is due to non-relevant coding or context units which do not fulfill the requirements stated in the chapters 4.3.1.2. and 4.3.1.3. Another reason was that certain corporations were not present (enough) on certain social media platforms at the time of observation.

5.2. Corporate Communication Strategy Results

In the following subchapters, corporate communication strategy results are displayed, starting with corporations' entire analyzed digital corporate communication strategies, followed by social media communication strategies and, lastly, corporate communication strategies on websites.

5.2.1. Digital Corporate Communication Strategy Results

Digital corporate communication strategies represent the sum of all analyzed strategies at the context unit level. These are displayed in two ways: Firstly, an absolute way of showing only the dominant strategy per strategic typology (stakeholder, content and objective-based strategies) and, secondly, a more detailed percentage distribution of all communication strategies per corporation is provided.

5.2.1.1. Dominant Digital Communication Strategies per Corporation

The analysis done on all coding and context units of a corporation has resulted in the dominant digital communication strategy. The next table shows the main digital corporate communication strategies per selected corporation.

Corporations	Dominant Digital Corporate Communication Strategy		
	Stakeholder-based	Content-based	Objective-based
Atos SE	External	Image	Informational
Austro Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	External	Image	Involvement
Doppler Group	External	Expertise	Informational
Fronius International GmbH	External	Expertise	Involvement
Gebrüder Haider Group	External	Expertise	Informational
Greiner AG	External	Image	Informational
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	External	Expertise	Involvement
Kellner & Kunz AG	External	Expertise	Involvement
Kelly GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Involvement
Lisec Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Involvement
Melecs Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
Miele & Cie. KG	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Österreichische Post AG	External	Image	Involvement
Palfinger AG	External	Expertise	Informational
Red Bull GmbH	External	Image	Involvement
Samsung Group	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Spitz S. GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Starlinger & Co GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
Trenkwalder International AG	External	Image	Involvement
T-Systems MMS GmbH	External	Expertise	Involvement
Voestalpine AG	External	Expertise	Informational
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational

Table 16: Dominant digital communication strategies per corporation

The above examination table solely lists those communication strategies that have predominantly been observed during the analysis process. This does not mean that the above strategies are the only ones that the respective corporations use; In fact, the vast majority has been found to utilize other communication strategies identified in this Master's Thesis' literature review. The above results clearly show that, in total, all observed corporations' digital communication strategies targeted external stakeholders. This comes as no surprise, as both websites and social media profiles are, by their very nature, predominantly externally aligned communication channels. Regarding content-based strategies, most companies focused on expertise communication strategies, some have specialized using image communication strategies while none were found to use hybrid strategies for the most part. Finally, in terms of corporate communication objectives, 12 companies focused on informing their audiences, while 9 strived to involve their targeted stakeholders. Merely 5 primarily pursued a persuasive corporate communication strategy. As stated above, this evaluation displays results in an absolute manner (i.e., the dominant corporate communication strategies). A more detailed

representation of the above data is provided in the next chapter via presentation of percentage distributions of digital corporate communication strategies per corporation.

5.2.1.2. Distribution of Digital Communication Strategies per Corporation

This chapter shows the assessment using a percentage distribution of corporate communication strategies at the coding unit levels. The table below provides further insights regarding the exact composition of the results in the previous chapter.

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
	Internal	External	Expertise	Image	Hybrid	Informational	Persuasive	Involvement
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		
Atos SE	6%	94%	40%	52%	8%	62%	14%	24%
Austro Holding GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	80%	20%	0%
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	19%	81%	23%	77%	0%	13%	3%	84%
Doppler Group	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	70%	20%	10%
Fronius International GmbH	2%	98%	62%	38%	0%	14%	21%	64%
Gebrüder Haider Group	0%	100%	89%	11%	0%	78%	0%	22%
Greiner AG	0%	100%	18%	73%	8%	57%	0%	43%
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	0%	100%	90%	10%	0%	5%	85%	10%
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	0%	100%	68%	30%	3%	14%	35%	51%
Kellner & Kunz AG	17%	83%	67%	33%	0%	23%	30%	47%
Kelly GmbH	0%	100%	80%	15%	5%	10%	55%	35%
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	0%	100%	41%	36%	23%	32%	23%	45%
Lisec Holding GmbH	7%	93%	67%	27%	7%	37%	23%	40%
Melecs Holding GmbH	6%	94%	53%	47%	0%	53%	6%	41%
Miele & Cie. KG	0%	100%	74%	23%	2%	33%	53%	14%
Österreichische Post AG	8%	92%	38%	56%	5%	3%	36%	62%
Palfinger AG	0%	100%	84%	14%	3%	81%	14%	5%
Red Bull GmbH	0%	100%	0%	98%	2%	0%	0%	100%
Samsung Group	2%	98%	72%	20%	8%	12%	52%	36%
Spitz S. GmbH	0%	100%	66%	14%	21%	10%	55%	34%
Starlinger & Co GmbH	0%	100%	48%	39%	13%	65%	0%	35%
Trenkwalder International AG	10%	90%	20%	78%	3%	28%	10%	63%
T-Systems MMS GmbH	4%	96%	62%	32%	6%	38%	18%	44%
Voestalpine AG	0%	100%	65%	22%	13%	46%	35%	20%
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	0%	100%	58%	42%	0%	58%	13%	29%
Total	3%	97%	59%	35%	5%	37%	25%	38%
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		

Table 17: Distribution of digital communication strategies per corporation

Dissecting the above percentage distributions, the previous chapter's understanding is highlighted with regards to the fact that, even if a few corporations diffused some degree of

internally directed digital corporate communication, the ultimate extent of its application was minuscule (3%) compared to that of external corporate communication strategies (97%). The results of the indicator analysis, which is featured in greater detail in later chapters, clearly shows, among others, that the most targeted external stakeholder groups were (potential) customers. Similarly, the dominant ranking of content-based strategies in the previous chapter can clearly be observed at the coding unit level: Expertise strategies were the most common at 59%, followed by image strategies (35%) while hybrid strategies remained rare exceptions. The underlying indicators responsible for this overall result were, in the case of expertise strategies, mostly compared of presentations of companies' products and services while image strategies were in greatest part represented by content dealing with employee-centric topics such as career development, employee involvement and related opportunities or initiatives. When it comes to objective-based strategies, however, a new picture presents itself: While it is true that, on an absolute scale, informational strategies were dominating, a higher percentage amount of individual coding units employed involvement strategies. To exemplify this relation, 38% of objective-based strategies were involvement strategies while 37% constituted informational strategies. This can also be observed by the fact that, except for one company, each one has used involvement strategies within their coding units and frequently these types of strategies constituted a sizeable portion of overall objective-based strategies, even if other strategies were primarily used. The remaining portion of 25% of realized objective-based strategies were represented by persuasive strategies. The most widely used indicators for objective-based strategies are summarized as follows: Informational strategies were mostly employed by content providing factual information without using any particular format, persuasive strategies were presented in the form of concrete offers (such as links to webshops or sale announcements) and involvement strategies were mainly represented by content directly addressing potential stakeholders (such as questions, invitations, competitions, etc.). Results regarding strategies' underlying indicators are further explored as this chapter progresses, more concrete illustrations, however, are provided in those subchapters dealing with individual context units.

5.2.2. Social Media Corporate Communication Strategy Results

This chapter analyzes all corporate communication results from social media context units (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn). Firstly, a holistic perspective of all social media context units summed up has been created by showcasing the dominant results for all communication strategy typologies and then exploring detailed results using percentage distributions for each strategy typology. Secondly, each context unit is analyzed individually using the above methodology with the addition of examining communication strategies at the micro-level by observing the indicators which represent the smallest scope of research.

5.2.2.1. Dominant Social Media Communication Strategies per Corporation

In this chapter, the focus is placed on providing dominant communication strategy results on social media context units (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn) only. Because two out of the 25 analyzed corporation were not present on social media platforms in an adequate way, this analysis featured 23 corporations. Similar to the presentation of the entire digital corporate communication strategies in the two chapters above, the observed dominant social media corporate communication strategies per corporation are shown in the table below:

Corporations	Social Media Corporate Communication Strategy		
	Stakeholder-based	Content-based	Objective-based
Atos SE	External	Image	Informational
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	External	Image	Involvement
Fronius International GmbH	External	Expertise	Involvement
Gebrüder Haider Group	External	Expertise	Informational
Greiner AG	External	Image	Informational and Involvement
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	External	Expertise	Involvement
Kellner & Kunz AG	External	Expertise and Image	Involvement
Kelly GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive and Involvement
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	External	Image	Involvement
Lisec Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Involvement
Melecs Holding GmbH	External	Image	Involvement
Miele & Cie. KG	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Österreichische Post AG	External	Image	Involvement
Palfinger AG	External	Expertise	Informational
Red Bull GmbH	External	Image	Involvement
Samsung Group	External	Expertise	Persuasive

	Social Media Corporate Communication Strategy		
Spitz S. GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Starlinger & Co GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
Trenkwalder International AG	External	Image	Involvement
T-Systems MMS GmbH	External	Expertise	Involvement
Voestalpine AG	External	Expertise	Informational
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	External	Image	Informational

Table 18: Dominant social media communication strategies per corporation

Observing the above table, it is clear that, regarding the targeted stakeholders, there was virtually no difference in the case of employed social-media-only communication strategies. However, one significant change is related to the usage of content-based strategies: While expertise strategies were still the most frequently used content-based strategies on an absolute scale, image strategies represented a much more common pick on social media. Finally, the most considerable difference when looking at social media communication strategies has to do with objective-based strategies, as involvement strategies were by far the most frequently used alternatives on these platforms.

5.2.2.1.a Distribution of Social Media Communication Strategies per Corporation

This chapter shows the assessment in the form of percentage distributions of corporate communication strategies at the coding unit level. The exact composition of the results in the previous chapter are provided in the table below.

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
	Internal	External	Expertise	Image	Hybrid	Informational	Persuasive	Involvement
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		
Atos SE	8%	93%	38%	58%	5%	58%	13%	30%
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	23%	77%	12%	88%	0%	8%	0%	92%
Fronius International GmbH	3%	97%	59%	41%	0%	3%	22%	75%
Gebrüder Haider Group	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Greiner AG	0%	100%	8%	83%	10%	50%	0%	50%
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	10%	70%	20%
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	0%	100%	63%	33%	4%	4%	33%	63%
Kellner & Kunz AG	25%	75%	50%	50%	0%	20%	10%	70%
Kelly GmbH	0%	100%	80%	10%	10%	0%	50%	50%
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	0%	100%	15%	46%	38%	8%	15%	77%

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
Lisec Holding GmbH	10%	90%	55%	35%	10%	40%	15%	45%
Melecs Holding GmbH	9%	91%	27%	73%	0%	27%	9%	64%
Miele & Cie. KG	0%	100%	75%	22%	3%	22%	61%	17%
Österreichische Post AG	10%	90%	23%	70%	7%	0%	33%	67%
Palfinger AG	0%	100%	83%	17%	0%	87%	10%	3%
Red Bull GmbH	0%	100%	0%	97%	3%	0%	0%	100%
Samsung Group	3%	98%	68%	23%	10%	15%	45%	40%
Spitz S. GmbH	0%	100%	52%	19%	29%	14%	48%	38%
Starlinger & Co GmbH	0%	100%	54%	46%	0%	54%	0%	46%
Trenkwalder International AG	13%	87%	0%	97%	3%	13%	6%	81%
T-Systems MMS GmbH	5%	95%	53%	40%	8%	33%	18%	50%
Voestalpine AG	0%	100%	64%	23%	13%	44%	36%	21%
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	0%	100%	38%	62%	0%	43%	19%	38%
Total	5%	95%	48%	46%	7%	28%	22%	49%
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		

Table 19: Distribution of social media communication strategies per corporation

The results displayed within the table above are elaborated upon: The external-facing nature of social media communication is proven by the fact that 95% of communication was facing external stakeholders. Furthermore, social media featured a balanced content-based strategy composition with approx. 48% and 46% expertise and image strategies, respectively. The interactive environment of social media is emphasized by the fact that the majority of analyzed coding units, 49%, pursued the involvement of their targeted stakeholders. The remaining objective-based strategy distribution was almost evenly composed of informational and persuasive strategies. Social media communication indicator analyses have been conducted at the individual platform level only, as this approach was deemed more substantive. Together with corporate communication strategy results of the respective social media context units, these results are presented in the next chapters.

5.2.2.2. Distribution of Corporate Communication Strategies per Corporations' Social Media Context Units

In order to provide more nuanced insights which expand on the above results, corporate communication strategies are also presented at the level of each social media channel (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn). Because of the already detailed perspective used to observe the following results, only strategies' percentage distributions are shown. Furthermore, indicators responsible for composing the different communication strategies are explored in detail. The following must be mentioned when comparing communication strategy

results and indicator results: Any potential deviations in percentage distributions between the indicator analysis and the aggregate corporate communication strategy distribution are due to the possibility of multiple indicators of particular communication strategy typologies per coding unit and the fact that the summarized communication strategies have been calculated using the individual corporations' percentage results per corporate communication strategy typology (based on individual coding units) divided by the total number of analyzed corporations, while the indicator percentage results have been carried out only by adding the individual indicators per strategy typology and dividing them by the corresponding total number of indicators observed within that particular communication strategy typology. This circumstance holds true for all of the following social media context unit as well as website result presentations.

5.2.2.2.a Corporate Communication Strategy and Indicator Distribution on Facebook

23 corporations were found to have an adequate presence on Facebook in order to be analyzed according to the defined methodology. The table below features percentage distributions of corporate communication strategies per corporations' relevant Facebook profiles.

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
	Internal	External	Expertise	Image	Hybrid	Informational	Persuasive	Involvement
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		
Atos SE	0%	100%	70%	30%	0%	70%	30%	0%
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	20%	80%	10%	90%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Fronius International GmbH	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	10%	20%	70%
Gebrüder Haider Group	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Greiner AG	0%	100%	10%	80%	10%	60%	0%	40%
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	10%	70%	20%
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	0%	100%	20%	80%	0%	0%	10%	90%
Kellner & Kunz AG	10%	90%	80%	20%	0%	40%	20%	40%
Kelly GmbH	0%	100%	80%	10%	10%	0%	50%	50%
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	0%	100%	10%	50%	40%	0%	20%	80%
Lisec Holding GmbH	20%	80%	40%	40%	20%	30%	10%	60%
Melecs Holding GmbH	14%	86%	43%	57%	0%	29%	14%	57%
Miele & Cie. KG	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	40%	50%	10%
Österreichische Post AG	10%	90%	40%	60%	0%	0%	40%	60%
Palfinger AG	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Red Bull GmbH	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Samsung Group	0%	100%	70%	30%	0%	0%	30%	70%

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
Spitz S. GmbH	0%	100%	40%	20%	40%	20%	30%	50%
Starlinger & Co GmbH	0%	100%	50%	50%	0%	50%	0%	50%
Trenkwalder International AG	10%	90%	0%	90%	10%	10%	10%	80%
T-Systems MMS GmbH	0%	100%	60%	30%	10%	30%	30%	40%
Voestalpine AG	0%	100%	67%	22%	11%	56%	44%	0%
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	0%	100%	20%	80%	0%	30%	10%	60%
Total	4%	96%	50%	43%	7%	30%	21%	49%
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		

Table 20: Distribution of social media communication strategies per corporations' Facebook context units

Corporate communication on Facebook was externally oriented and most of the analyzed content-based strategy mainly focused on expertise (50%) and image (43%). Regarding objectives of the analyzed corporate communication, the involvement of stakeholders was the most frequently chosen strategy, with almost half of all corporate communication seeking it through content represented by attention-seeking posts or direct interactions with stakeholders. The results of the indicator analysis summarized for all analyzed Facebook context units are presented in the following three tables.

Stakeholder-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Internal stakeholder communication strategy	Employees	8	3,51%
External stakeholder communication strategy	Communities	4	1,75%
	Customers	91	39,91%
	External	78	34,21%
	Governments	2	0,88%
	New partners	3	1,32%
	NGOs and activists	5	2,19%
	Partners	3	1,32%
	Potential employees	32	14,04%
Shareholders	2	0,88%	
Total		228	100,00%

Table 21: Facebook context units' stakeholder-based communication strategy indicator results

Regarding indicators of stakeholder-based strategies, employees were the only defined internal stakeholders and thus the only ones to have been addressed on Facebook as well as on any of the other context units. When it comes to external communication, the most specifically targeted stakeholder group was that of customers with approximately 40% of all

communication, followed by 34% of communication addressed at two or more stakeholders at the same time. Potential employees have had 14% of external corporate communication on Facebook addressed at them.

Content-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Expertise communication strategy	General information and news on company	9	4,29%
	Company expertise	4	1,90%
	Company products and/or services	69	32,86%
	Company projects	2	0,95%
	Company strategy and strategic decisions	5	2,38%
	Company success	8	3,81%
	References	4	1,90%
Image communication strategy	Educational commitment	1	0,48%
	Employee involvement, development, opportunities	43	20,48%
	Entertainment	9	4,29%
	Environmental stewardship and sustainability efforts	4	1,90%
	Event attendance	1	0,48%
	Industry specific topics of interest or controversy	9	4,29%
	Philanthropic commitment	9	4,29%
	Sponsorship	17	8,10%
Hybrid communication strategy	Hybrid	16	7,62%
	Total	210	100,00%

Table 22: Facebook context units' content-based communication strategy indicator results

Content-based communication strategies on Facebook were, in 33% of all cases, composed of presentations of analyzed companies' products or services, representing expertise communication strategies. Secondly, the most common image communication strategies on Facebook were, firstly, composed of content about employee involvement, development and employee opportunities, making up roughly 20%, and, secondly, content featuring sponsorship activities, representing around 8% of all content-based communication. Hybrid communication strategies, which are composed of a mixture of both expertise and image-based indicators, accounted for almost 8% of the analyzed content found on Facebook.

Objective-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Informational communication strategy	Announcement	3	1,44%
	Factual information	50	23,92%
	Report	1	0,48%

Objective-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Persuasive communication strategy	Offer	12	5,74%
	Promotion	36	17,22%
Involvement communication strategy	Attention seeking	49	23,44%
	Direct interactions	58	27,75%
	Total	209	100,00%

Table 23: Facebook context units' objective-based communication strategy indicator results

When it comes to objective-based communication strategies on Facebook, the most encountered strategic sub-typology was that of involvement strategies, composed of almost 28% direct interactions and 23% attention seeking posts. The second most encountered objective-based communication strategy, the informational strategy, has mostly been found to feature factual information without any specific format or structure (24%). Finally, persuasive strategies were mostly composed of promotional posts, which have been identified as making up approximately 17% of objective-based communication strategies on Facebook.

5.2.2.2.b Corporate Communication Strategy and Indicator Distribution on Instagram

17 corporations were found to have an adequate presence on Instagram in order to be analyzed according to the defined methodology. The table below features percentage distributions of corporate communication strategies per corporations' relevant Instagram profiles.

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
	Internal	External	Expertise	Image	Hybrid	Informational	Persuasive	Involvement
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		
Atos SE	20%	80%	10%	80%	10%	20%	10%	70%
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	33%	67%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Fronius International GmbH	0%	100%	60%	40%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Greiner AG	0%	100%	10%	80%	10%	60%	0%	40%
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	11%	44%	44%
Kellner & Kunz AG	40%	60%	20%	80%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Melecs Holding GmbH	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	25%	0%	75%
Miele & Cie. KG	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	0%	90%	10%
Österreichische Post AG	10%	90%	0%	80%	20%	0%	0%	100%
Palfinger AG	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Red Bull GmbH	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Samsung Group	0%	100%	80%	10%	10%	0%	50%	50%
Spitz S. GmbH	0%	100%	60%	20%	20%	0%	70%	30%

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
Trenkwalder International AG	10%	90%	0%	100%	0%	0%	10%	90%
T-Systems MMS GmbH	10%	90%	0%	80%	20%	0%	20%	80%
Voestalpine AG	0%	100%	40%	50%	10%	0%	20%	80%
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Total	7%	93%	33%	61%	6%	13%	20%	68%
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		

Table 24: Distribution of social media communication strategies per corporations' Instagram context units

Compared to Facebook, analyzed content on Instagram was found to have a heavier focus on image-based content, with 61% of the analyzed content striving to position the analyzed companies as valuable members of the society. Furthermore, in terms of objectives, corporate communication on Instagram mainly strived to involve stakeholders, with 68% of all posts on Instagram seeking attention or interaction from their respective viewers. The results of the indicator analysis summarized for all analyzed Instagram context units are presented in the following three tables.

Stakeholder-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Internal stakeholder communication strategy	Employees	11	6,88%
External stakeholder communication strategy	Communities	1	0,63%
	Customers	55	34,38%
	External	60	37,50%
	Governments	6	3,75%
	New partners	3	1,88%
	NGOs and activists	3	1,88%
	Partners	4	2,50%
	Potential employees	15	9,38%
	Shareholders	2	1,25%
	Total	160	100,00%

Table 25: Instagram context units' stakeholder-based communication strategy indicator results

After having analyzing stakeholder-based strategy indicators on Instagram, the following situation unfolded: 37,5% of corporate communication was aimed at the general public, followed by approximately 34% specifically directed at both current and potential customers. Around 9% of analyzed corporations' communication was aimed at potential employees.

Content-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Expertise communication strategy	Company expertise	1	0,67%
	Company products/services	43	28,67%
	Company projects	0	0,00%
	Company strategy and strategic decisions	2	1,33%
	Company success	1	0,67%
	General information and news on company	2	1,33%
	References	3	2,00%
Image communication strategy	Educational commitment	1	0,67%
	Employee involvement, development, opportunities	38	25,33%
	Entertainment	14	9,33%
	Environmental stewardship and sustainability efforts	8	5,33%
	Event attendance	5	3,33%
	Industry specific topics of interest or controversy	2	1,33%
	Philanthropic commitment	3	2,00%
	Sponsorship	17	11,33%
Hybrid communication strategy	Hybrid	10	6,67%
	Total	150	100,00%

Table 26: Instagram context units' content-based communication strategy indicator results

The analyzed content on Instagram was, similar to the general result of this research, mostly composed of presentations of products and services, which made up almost 29% of analyzed Instagram posts. However, besides that, expertise strategies were a rare sight on Instagram, because unlike Facebook, this platform was mainly used for image-related communication. That is why posts concerning employment and career (25%), corporate sponsorship (11%) and entertainment (9%) made up the bulk of Instagram content.

Objective-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Informational communication strategy	Announcement	0	0,00%
	Factual information	20	13,33%
	Report	0	0,00%
Persuasive communication strategy	Offer	19	12,67%
	Promotion	14	9,33%
Involvement communication strategy	Attention seeking	51	34,00%
	Direct interactions	46	30,67%
	Total	150	100,00%

Table 27: Instagram context units' objective-based communication strategy indicator results

The dominant interactive nature of corporate communication on Instagram was further highlighted by the occurrence of appropriate indicators: 34% and 31% of posts on Instagram aimed to seek stakeholder attention and directly interact with target stakeholders, respectively. Persuasive communication strategies were the second most widely used methods of communication, with almost 13% of posts being offers and 9% representing promotional activity of any kind. Informal communication strategies were entirely made up of factual information, which in total constituted 13% of objective-based communication on Instagram.

5.2.2.2.c Corporate Communication Strategy and Indicator Distribution on Twitter

12 corporations were found to have an adequate presence on Twitter in order to be analyzed according to the defined methodology. The table below features percentage distributions of corporate communication strategies per corporations' relevant Twitter profiles.

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
	Internal	External	Expertise	Image	Hybrid	Informational	Persuasive	Involvement
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		
Atos SE	10%	90%	0%	100%	0%	70%	10%	20%
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	20%	80%	20%	80%	0%	20%	0%	80%
Fronius International GmbH	10%	90%	50%	50%	0%	0%	30%	70%
Greiner AG	0%	100%	10%	70%	20%	30%	0%	70%
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	0%	100%	33%	33%	33%	33%	0%	67%
Miele & Cie. KG	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	10%	60%	30%
Red Bull GmbH	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Samsung Group	0%	100%	70%	0%	30%	30%	30%	40%
Starlinger & Co GmbH	0%	100%	25%	75%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Trenkwalder International AG	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%
T-Systems MMS GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	60%	20%	20%
Voestalpine AG	0%	100%	80%	10%	10%	90%	10%	0%
Total	3%	97%	39%	53%	8%	45%	13%	41%
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		

Table 28: Distribution of social media communication strategies per corporations' Twitter context units

Twitter, unlike Facebook and similar to Instagram, has been found to feature a content focus on image communication strategies as 53% of Twitter posts were geared towards improving corporations' images. However, unlike both previously presented social networks, corporations have mostly focused on informing potential stakeholders, represented by 45% of analyzed coding units, rather than persuading or involving them.

The results of the indicator analysis summarized for all analyzed Twitter context units are presented in the following three tables.

Stakeholder-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Internal stakeholder communication strategy	Employees	4	3,70%
External stakeholder communication strategy	Communities	6	5,56%
	Customers	37	34,26%
	External	50	46,30%
	Governments	2	1,85%
	New partners	1	0,93%
	NGOs and activists	2	1,85%
	Partners	0	0,00%
	Potential employees	1	0,93%
	Shareholders	5	4,63%
	Total	108	100,00%

Table 29: Twitter context units' stakeholder-based communication strategy indicator results

The above table shows that corporations on Twitter primarily employed multi-stakeholder communication strategies, as it can be seen from the fact that over 46% of communicated Twitter posts were directed toward multiple stakeholders. Unsurprisingly though, customers were the second most addressed target groups with 34% of all Twitter communication directed at them.

Content-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Expertise communication strategy	Company expertise	7	7,14%
	Company products/services	25	25,51%
	Company projects	1	1,02%
	Company strategy and strategic decisions	5	5,10%
	Company success	0	0,00%
	General information and news on company	4	4,08%
	References	1	1,02%
Image communication strategy	Educational commitment	1	1,02%
	Employee involvement, development, opportunities	11	11,22%
	Entertainment	1	1,02%
	Environmental stewardship and sustainability efforts	7	7,14%
	Event attendance	1	1,02%
	Industry specific topics of interest or controversy	2	2,04%
	Philanthropic commitment	1	1,02%

Content-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
	Sponsorship	24	24,49%
Hybrid communication strategy	Hybrid	7	7,14%
	Total	98	100,00%

Table 30: Twitter context units' content-based communication strategy indicator results

Concerning expertise-based communication strategies on Twitter, the analyzed companies have mostly employed these by communicating about products and services, which made up nearly 26% of all communication on this platform. However, Twitter was mostly used for image strategies, which can be seen by the fact that almost 25% of corporations' communication has been about sponsorship activities and 11% about employment and career development. Hybrid strategies, as it was the case on all observed context units, remained rarely used on Twitter as well.

Objective-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Informational communication strategy	Announcement	7	7,14%
	Factual information	29	29,59%
	Report	1	1,02%
Persuasive communication strategy	Offer	12	12,24%
	Promotion	4	4,08%
Involvement communication strategy	Attention seeking	29	29,59%
	Direct interactions	16	16,33%
	Total	98	100,00%

Table 31: Twitter context units' objective-based communication strategy indicator results

The particularly heavy usage of Twitter as a platform for informational strategies can be observed by the fact that almost 30% of Twitter posts transmitted factual information. Other than that, involvement strategies were actually more common on an indicator basis, with almost 30% of communication consisting of attention-seeking posts and 16% being direct interactions with stakeholders. Promotional strategies, on the other hand, were used relatively infrequently on Twitter.

5.2.2.2.d Corporate Communication Strategy and Indicator Distribution on LinkedIn

16 corporations were found to have an adequate presence on LinkedIn in order to be analyzed according to the defined methodology. The table below features percentage distributions of corporate communication strategies per corporations' relevant LinkedIn profiles.

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
	Internal	External	Expertise	Image	Hybrid	Informational	Persuasive	Involvement
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		
Atos SE	0%	100%	70%	20%	10%	70%	0%	30%
Fronius International GmbH	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Greiner AG	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	50%	0%	50%
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	0%	100%	75%	13%	13%	0%	50%	50%
Lisec Holding GmbH	0%	100%	70%	30%	0%	50%	20%	30%
Miele & Cie. KG	0%	100%	50%	33%	17%	50%	33%	17%
Österreichische Post AG	10%	90%	30%	70%	0%	0%	60%	40%
Palfinger AG	0%	100%	50%	50%	0%	60%	30%	10%
Red Bull GmbH	0%	100%	0%	88%	13%	0%	0%	100%
Samsung Group	10%	90%	50%	50%	0%	30%	70%	0%
Spitz S. GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Starlinger & Co GmbH	0%	100%	71%	29%	0%	29%	0%	71%
Trenkwalder International AG	20%	80%	0%	100%	0%	20%	0%	80%
T-Systems MMS GmbH	10%	90%	50%	50%	0%	40%	0%	60%
Voestalpine AG	0%	100%	70%	10%	20%	30%	70%	0%
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	0%	100%	60%	40%	0%	60%	30%	10%
Total	3%	97%	47%	49%	4%	37%	23%	41%
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		

Table 32: Distribution of social media communication strategies per corporations' LinkedIn context units

Comparing all communication strategy results of the analyzed context units, LinkedIn results are arguably the most balanced ones with relatively close compositions of content-based communication strategies, namely 47% being expertise and 49% being image strategies. The two most common objective-based strategies, informational strategies and involvement strategies were also located relatively close to each other in terms of occurrence on LinkedIn, with almost 37% and 41%, respectively.

The results of the indicator analysis summarized for all analyzed LinkedIn context units are presented in the following three tables.

Stakeholder-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Internal stakeholder communication strategy	Employees	4	2,67%
External stakeholder communication strategy	Communities	7	4,67%
	Customers	37	24,67%
	External	52	34,67%
	Governments	7	4,67%
	New partners	3	2,00%
	NGOs and activists	13	8,67%
	Partners	5	3,33%
	Potential employees	19	12,67%
	Shareholders	3	2,00%
	Total	150	100,00%

Table 33: LinkedIn context units' stakeholder-based communication strategy indicator results

Aside from the fact that most indicators hinted towards a multi-stakeholder strategy (35%) and a consumer-focused external communication strategy (25%), the reputation of LinkedIn as a professional career-related social network can be observed by the fact that almost 13% of analyzed corporations' communication was meant for potential employees.

Content-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Expertise communication strategy	Company expertise	8	6,06%
	Company products/services	28	21,21%
	Company projects	5	3,79%
	Company strategy and strategic decisions	8	6,06%
	Company success	4	3,03%
	General information and news on company	7	5,30%
	References	0	0,00%
Image communication strategy	Educational commitment	3	2,27%
	Employee involvement, development, opportunities	31	23,48%
	Entertainment	3	2,27%
	Environmental stewardship and sustainability efforts	14	10,61%
	Event attendance	1	0,76%
	Industry specific topics of interest or controversy	2	1,52%
	Philanthropic commitment	3	2,27%
	Sponsorship	9	6,82%
Hybrid communication strategy	Hybrid	6	4,55%
	Total	132	100,00%

Table 34: LinkedIn context units' content-based communication strategy indicator results

The results of content-based strategy indicators again highlight LinkedIn's focus on jobs and careers of its users because more than 23% of corporations' posts were about career-related

topics. Again, expertise communication strategies were widely used on LinkedIn, with 21% of communication being about companies' products and services.

Objective-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Informational communication strategy	Announcement	4	3,03%
	Factual information	37	28,03%
	Report	6	4,55%
Persuasive communication strategy	Offer	29	21,97%
	Promotion	5	3,79%
Involvement communication strategy	Attention seeking	21	15,91%
	Direct interactions	30	22,73%
	Total	132	100,00%

Table 35: LinkedIn context units' objective-based communication strategy indicator results

Regarding corporate communication objectives, involvement led the way on LinkedIn with 23% of companies choosing to interact with their stakeholders and almost 16% striving to get attention. However, both informational strategies and persuasive strategies had a high usage rate with 28% of LinkedIn posts providing factual information and 22% being concrete offers regarding company services and products.

5.2.3. Website Corporate Communication Strategy Results

Website corporate communication results only include analyses done on website context units. Firstly, the dominant strategies are explored before examining more detailed compositions of communication strategies as well as the indicators which represent the smallest scope of research.

5.2.3.1. Dominant Website Corporate Communication Strategies per Corporation

This chapter is focused on providing dominant communication strategy results on websites. Similar to the presentations of corporate communication strategies before, the observed dominant website corporate communication strategies per corporation are shown in the following table:

Corporations	Website Corporate Communication Strategy		
	Stakeholder-based	Content-based	Objective-based
Atos SE	External	Expertise	Informational
Austro Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	External	Expertise	Informational and Involvement

	Website Corporate Communication Strategy		
Doppler Group	External	Expertise	Informational
Fronius International GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
Gebrüder Haider Group	External	Expertise	Informational
Greiner AG	External	Expertise	Informational
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	External	Expertise	Informational and Persuasive
Kellner & Kunz AG	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Kelly GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Lisec Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Involvement
Melecs Holding GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
Miele & Cie. KG	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Österreichische Post AG	External	Expertise	Persuasive and Involvement
Palfinger AG	External	Expertise	Informational
Red Bull GmbH	External	Image	Involvement
Samsung Group	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Spitz S. GmbH	External	Expertise	Persuasive
Starlinger & Co GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
Trenkwalder International AG	External	Expertise	Informational
T-Systems MMS GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational
Voestalpine AG	External	Expertise	Informational
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	External	Expertise	Informational

Table 36: Dominant website communication strategies per corporation

The most important insights of the above table are summarized: Again, external communication strategies dominated those directed at possible internal stakeholders. Furthermore, concerning content-based strategies, all corporations except for one mainly used expertise strategies. Finally, objective-based strategies were foremost composed of informational strategies and secondly of persuasive ones.

5.2.3.1.a Distribution of Website Corporate Communication Strategies and Indicators per Corporation

Table 37 features percentage distributions of corporate communication strategies on all analyzed websites.

Corporations	Stakeholder-based strategy		Content-based strategy			Objective-based strategy		
	Internal	External	Expertise	Image	Hybrid	Informational	Persuasive	Involvement
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		
Atos SE	0%	100%	50%	30%	20%	80%	20%	0%
Austro Holding GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	80%	20%	0%
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	40%	20%	40%
Doppler Group	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	70%	20%	10%
Fronius International GmbH	0%	100%	70%	30%	0%	50%	20%	30%
Gebrüder Haider Group	0%	100%	88%	13%	0%	75%	0%	25%
Greiner AG	0%	100%	67%	33%	0%	89%	0%	11%
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	40%	40%	20%
Kellner & Kunz AG	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	30%	70%	0%
Kelly GmbH	0%	100%	80%	20%	0%	20%	60%	20%
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	0%	100%	78%	22%	0%	67%	33%	0%
Lisec Holding GmbH	0%	100%	90%	10%	0%	30%	40%	30%
Melecs Holding GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Miele & Cie. KG	0%	100%	75%	22%	3%	22%	61%	17%
Österreichische Post AG	0%	100%	89%	11%	0%	11%	44%	44%
Palfinger AG	0%	100%	86%	0%	14%	57%	29%	14%
Red Bull GmbH	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Samsung Group	0%	100%	90%	10%	0%	0%	80%	20%
Spitz S. GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	75%	25%
Starlinger & Co GmbH	0%	100%	40%	30%	30%	80%	0%	20%
Trenkwalder International AG	0%	100%	89%	11%	0%	78%	22%	0%
T-Systems MMS GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	60%	20%	20%
Voestalpine AG	0%	100%	64%	23%	13%	44%	36%	21%
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	90%	0%	10%
Total	0%	100%	81%	16%	3%	48%	32%	19%
	100,00%		100,00%			100,00%		

Table 37: Distribution of website communication strategies per corporation

The percentage distribution perspective of corporate communication on websites further highlights its complete external orientation. Another identified distinct pattern on corporate websites was their strong orientation towards communicating expertise (81%) compared to image (16%). Finally, the predominant objective of corporate communication on websites was to inform (49%) rather than persuade (32%) or involve (19%) stakeholders.

The results of the indicator analysis summarized for all analyzed website context units are presented in the following three tables.

Stakeholder-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Internal stakeholder communication strategy	Employees	8	3,43%
External stakeholder communication strategy	Communities	0	0,00%
	Customers	114	48,93%
	External	90	38,63%
	Governments	0	0,00%
	New partners	3	1,29%
	NGOs and activists	2	0,86%
	Partners	4	1,72%
	Potential employees	8	3,43%
	Shareholders	4	1,72%
	Total	233	100,00%

Table 38: Website context units' stakeholder-based communication strategy indicator results

When it comes to stakeholder-based strategies, all analyzed websites clearly showed a customer-centric communication focus with almost 50% of all coding units being addressed at potential consumers of the respective companies. This makes websites the most consumer-focused context units out of all those which have been analyzed. The majority of the remaining communication was targeted at all other remaining stakeholders.

Content-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Expertise communication strategy	Company expertise	10	4,44%
	Company products/services	97	43,11%
	Company projects	6	2,67%
	Company strategy and strategic decisions	10	4,44%
	Company success	4	1,78%
	General information and news on company	45	20,00%
	References	9	4,00%
Image communication strategy	Educational commitment	2	0,89%

Content-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
	Employee involvement, development, opportunities	8	3,56%
	Entertainment	1	0,44%
	Environmental stewardship and sustainability efforts	2	0,89%
	Event attendance	3	1,33%
	Industry specific topics of interest or controversy	3	1,33%
	Philanthropic commitment	3	1,33%
	Sponsorship	13	5,78%
Hybrid communication strategy	Hybrid	9	4,00%
	Total	225	100,00%

Table 39: Website context units' content-based communication strategy indicator results

Content-based strategies on websites were for the most part based on presentations of expertise which is reflected by the fact that 43% of all analyzed content was composed of communication about corporations' products and services and 20% was made up of general information and news on the respective companies. Because of this heavy focus on presenting corporations' expertise to potential customers, it has been found that image strategies were only used in a subordinated way.

Objective-based strategy sub-typologies	Types of indicators	Occurrence of indicators	%
Informational communication strategy	Announcement	9	4,00%
	Factual information	103	45,78%
	Report	2	0,89%
Persuasive communication strategy	Offer	45	20,00%
	Promotion	27	12,00%
Involvement communication strategy	Attention seeking	18	8,00%
	Direct interactions	21	9,33%
	Total	225	100,00%

Table 40: Website context units' objective-based communication strategy indicator results

Although the main objective of corporate communication on websites was found to be informing stakeholders with factual information (46%), persuading visitors was the second most common goal of all analyzed websites, with offers and promotions having been communicated 20% and 12% of the time, respectively. Compared to social networks, it becomes clear that traditional digital communication channels such as websites do not place a heavy emphasis on involvement strategies, as both attention-seeking and directly interactional content have scored modest usage rates

5.3. Assessment of Corporate Communication Strategies regarding Strategic Choice and Determinism

The second focus of this thesis' research and analysis efforts rests on the translation of the observed corporate communication into evaluations concerning strategic choice and determinism. This process of interpretation was done using the methodology outlined in the chapters 4.3.2.2.a and 4.3.2.2.b. In a similar fashion to the display of results on corporate communication strategies in chapter 5.2., strategic choice and determinism interpretations are presented along the points of view of the corporation's entire digital communication strategies as well as individual website and social media context units.

5.3.1. Strategic Choice and Determinism Interpretations of Corporations' Digital Corporate Communication Strategies

On the level of the entire digital communication of corporations, the ratings of strategic choice and determinism of analyzed corporations are illustrated in figure 9. This figure presents results related to strategic choice and determinism using the strategic choice and determinism continuum introduced in figure 7. The reason for this choice of demonstration lies in the results' relevancy for the entirety of corporations, reflected by the fact that all context units are included in this composition. Furthermore, in order to highlight corporations' results, table 41 lists the dominant state of power per corporation.

Analyzed Corporations' Positions on the Strategic Choice-Determinism Continuum

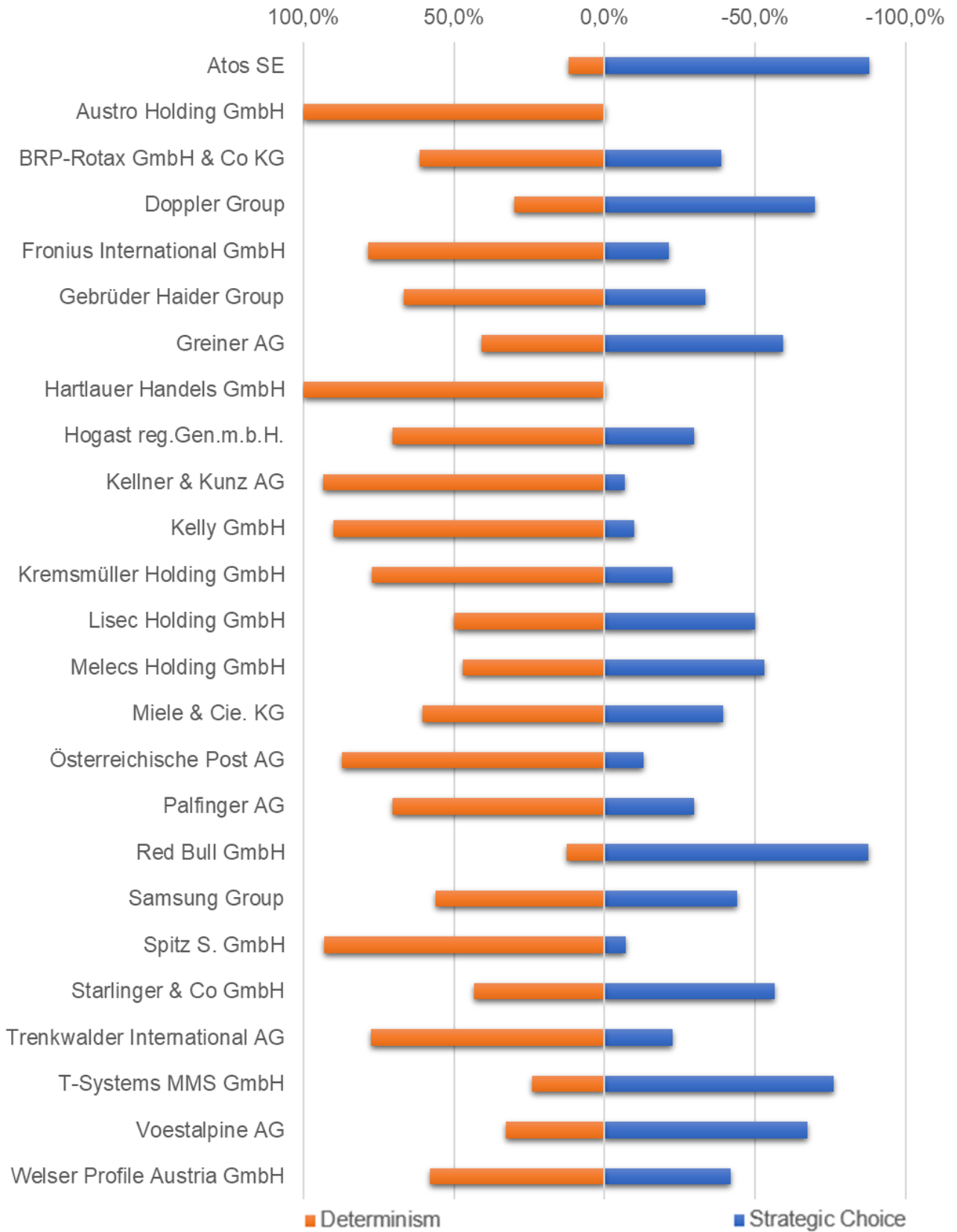


Figure 9: Analyzed corporations' positions on the strategic choice-determinism continuum

Corporations	Total Digital Communication
Atos SE	Strategic Choice
Austro Holding GmbH	Determinism
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	Determinism
Doppler Group	Strategic Choice
Fronius International GmbH	Determinism
Gebrüder Haider Group	Determinism
Greiner AG	Strategic Choice
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	Determinism
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H.	Determinism
Kellner & Kunz AG	Determinism
Kelly GmbH	Determinism
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	Determinism
Lisec Holding GmbH	Strategic Choice and Determinism
Melecs Holding GmbH	Strategic Choice
Miele & Cie. KG	Determinism
Österreichische Post AG	Determinism
Palfinger AG	Determinism
Red Bull GmbH	Strategic Choice
Samsung Group	Determinism
Spitz S. GmbH	Determinism
Starlinger & Co GmbH	Strategic Choice
Trenkwalder International AG	Determinism
T-Systems MMS GmbH	Strategic Choice
Voestalpine AG	Strategic Choice
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	Determinism

Table 41: Dominant assessment of strategic choice and determinism per corporations' entire digital communication

In total, approximately 61% of analyzed corporations' digital communication projected a deterministic image while 39% showed overall situations of strategic choice. In other words, the majority of corporations in the chosen sample communicated, either directly or indirectly, a certain degree of dependence and other-directedness by either their environment and/or their internal structure. In contrast, the remaining minority of organizations either showed or implied through their digital communication the ability, power and willingness to influence and/or change their environment and internal structures, thereby representing the source of decisional power. It must be noted that one corporation is located exactly at the middle between strategic choice and determinism (i.e., Lisec Holding). Possible correlations with digital communication strategy results are discussed in chapter 6.

5.3.2. Strategic Choice and Determinism Interpretations per Corporations' Context Units

In order to provide a more detailed explanation of strategic choice and determinism impressions related to the different social media platforms, the following breakdown on the level of individual context units is provided in the table below. Due to the, in comparison with the results of the previous chapter, reduced scale of the subsequent results, presentations using percentage distribution of the strategic choice-determinism continuum are unsuitable. Therefore, only the dominant results per context unit are provided via the table below. However, in order to offer more quantitative insights, the overall distribution of strategic choice and determinism interpretations per context units are illustrated within continuum illustrations in figure 10.

Corporation	Website	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn
Atos SE	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice
Austro Holding GmbH	Determinism	-	-	-	-
BRP-Rotax GmbH & Co KG	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	Strategic Choice	-
Doppler Group	Strategic Choice	-	-	-	-
Fronius International GmbH	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	Strategic Choice and Determinism
Gebrüder Haider Group	Determinism	Determinism	-	-	-
Greiner AG	Determinism	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice and Determinism	Strategic Choice
Hartlauer Handels GmbH	Determinism	Determinism	-	-	-
Hogast reg.Gen.m.b.H .	Strategic Choice	Determinism	Determinism	-	Determinism
Kellner & Kunz AG	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	-	-
Kelly GmbH	Determinism	Determinism	-	-	-
Kremsmüller Holding GmbH	Strategic Choice	Determinism	-	Determinism	-
Lisec Holding GmbH	Determinism	Strategic Choice and Determinism	-	-	Strategic Choice
Melecs Holding GmbH	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Determinism	-	-
Miele & Cie. KG	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	Strategic Choice

Corporation	Website	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn
Österreichische Post AG	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	-	Determinism
Palfinger AG	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	-	Strategic Choice
Red Bull GmbH	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Determinism
Samsung Group	Determinism	Determinism	Strategic Choice and Determinism	Strategic Choice and Determinism	Strategic Choice and Determinism
Spitz S. GmbH	Determinism	Determinism	Determinism	-	Strategic Choice
Starlinger & Co GmbH	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice and Determinism	-	Determinism	Strategic Choice
Trenkwalder International AG	Strategic Choice	Determinism	Determinism	Strategic Choice	Determinism
T-Systems MMS GmbH	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Determinism	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice
Voestalpine AG	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice and Determinism	Strategic Choice	Strategic Choice
Welser Profile Austria GmbH	Strategic Choice	Determinism	Determinism	-	Determinism

Table 42: Breakdown of strategic choice and determinism assessments per corporations' context units

Positions of Corporate Communication per Context Unit on the Strategic Choice-Determinism Continuum

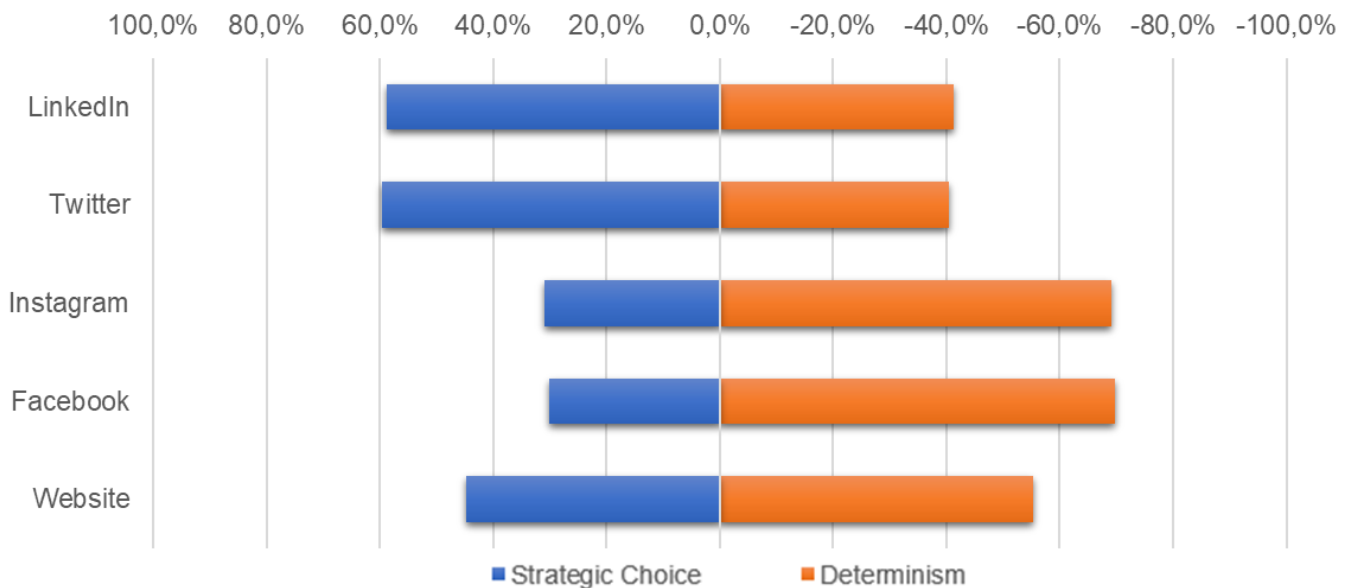


Figure 10: Positions of corporate communication per context unit on the strategic choice-determinism continuum

It can be taken from both the above table as well as the subsequent figure that some discrepancies relating to impressions of strategic choice and determinism between certain social media platforms exist. Firstly, those platforms exhibiting higher degrees of deterministic representations are explored: Facebook leads this category with approximately 70% of analyzed communication falling into the deterministic category while the remaining 30% can be attributed to representations of strategic choice. Instagram closely follows Facebook in this regard with a composition of 69% to 31% favoring determinism. Analyzed corporate websites also predominantly featured deterministic elements (approx. 55%). By comparison, corporations tend to display themselves more as strategic choosers than determined by their respective environments on Twitter and LinkedIn: Results on Twitter show a share of communication favoring strategic choice of approx. 60% while LinkedIn results display a similar number with 59%. The indicator analysis in the next chapter further explores the differences observed in the above results.

5.3.3. Strategic Choice and Determinism Indicator Analysis per Context Unit

In order to provide more detailed insights into the existence of differences between these digital communication channels, the results of the analysis of strategic choice and determinism indicators is provided in the tables illustrated in the next two subchapters.

5.3.3.1. Strategic Choice Indicator Results

Table 43 features all observed indicators relevant for determining levels of strategic choice per analyzed context unit. The results are examined in a detailed way in the paragraphs below the table.

Strategic Choice Indicators	Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		LinkedIn		Website		Total	
	Occurrence		Occurrence		Occurrence		Occurrence		Occurrence		Occurrence	
Substantial or disruptive level of innovation	13	20%	8	15%	15	24%	23	31%	20	20%	79	22%
Willingness and flexibility to execute strategic changes and initiatives	13	20%	12	23%	6	10%	19	26%	10	10%	60	17%
Slack resources	25	38%	23	44%	31	50%	18	24%	17	17%	114	32%
Competitive advantages	7	11%	6	12%	4	6%	7	9%	25	25%	49	14%
Power to determine environment	1	2%	0	0%	1	2%	3	4%	3	3%	8	2%
Market or industry-spanning presence or ability	1	2%	1	2%	2	3%	1	1%	11	11%	16	5%

Strategic Choice Indicators	Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		LinkedIn		Website		Total	
	Leader in respective market or segment	5	8%	2	4%	3	5%	3	4%	16	16%	29	8%
Total	65	100%	52	100%	62	100%	74	100%	102	100%	355	100%

Table 43: Strategic choice indicators per analyzed context unit

Firstly, observing the total occurrence of strategic choice indicators across all context units, it becomes evident that the most crucial element for the prevalence of strategic choice was content which depicts that companies' possess slack resources, which represent the availability of resources that can be allocated freely (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2009). According to the assumption of this research methodology, it is established that 32% of all analyzed corporate communication implies situations of strategic choice by presenting the existence of slack resources (e.g., by displaying investments, sponsorships or philanthropic contribution to certain social projects/initiatives). This type of content has been found to mostly be communicated on Twitter and Facebook. The second most common types of strategic choice indicators within this analysis, with 22% of all strategic choice occurrences, were those instances in which corporations exhibited levels of innovation which seemed to be least substantial and possibly even disruptive. Out of all analyzed digital communication channels, LinkedIn and corporate websites were primarily chosen to communicate substantial or disruptive innovation to the respective corporations' stakeholders. The third most frequently encountered type of indicators, resulting in 17% of all occurrences, was represented by content which shows willingness and flexibility to execute strategic changes and initiatives, both from corporations' internal as well as external point of views. In this regard, LinkedIn and Facebook were the context units which attributed most of these indicators towards the final result. The remaining indicators are ranked in the following order concerning their occurrences: Competitive advantages, leader positioning within corporations' respective markets/industries/segments, ability to traverse new markets/industries or presence on multiple markets/industries and, lastly, power to determine the respective environment(s). The following particularities of context units in connection to strategic choice indicators have been found: Websites feature the highest occurrence of presentations of competitive advantages, positionings as market leaders and multi-market positionings, which most likely results from the fact that these communication channels are the only ones which only belong to each particular company, compared to social networks, where corporations compete in a more direct way for stakeholders' attention and thus other type of content was found to be more prevalent. Moreover, it has been observed that slack resources were more frequently presented on non-career-focused social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, which is a plausible result considering that most displays of slack resources were sponsorships of events, individuals or philanthropy (which are all arguably social topics). Compared to all other

communication channels, LinkedIn seems to feature a mixture of corporate websites and social networks when it comes to strategic choice indicator usage, as, on LinkedIn, more business-related topics represented by content about R&D as well as strategy-related information have been diffused compared to the other social networks.

5.3.3.2. Determinism Indicator Results

Table 44 features all observed indicators relevant for establishing levels of determinism per analyzed context unit. The results are examined in a detailed way in the paragraphs below the table.

Determinism Indicators	Facebook		Instagram		Twitter		LinkedIn		Website		Total	
	Occurrence		Occurrence		Occurrence		Occurrence		Occurrence		Occurrence	
Competitive parity	16	11%	20	20%	6	17%	9	16%	26	21%	77	17%
Determined by environment (clients, industry)	10	7%	6	6%	5	14%	7	12%	10	8%	38	8%
Existing or already known products or services	72	49%	40	41%	13	36%	11	19%	56	46%	192	42%
Focus on increasing efficiencies or reducing inefficiencies	5	3%	0	0%	0	0%	5	9%	4	3%	14	3%
Focus on stability and adaptiveness to environment	2	1%	6	6%	0	0%	2	3%	9	7%	19	4%
Internal structural rigidity	39	27%	22	22%	9	25%	20	34%	12	10%	102	22%
Low or incremental level of innovation	3	2%	4	4%	3	8%	4	7%	5	4%	19	4%
Total	147	100%	98	100%	36	100%	58	100%	122	100%	461	100%

Table 44: Determinism indicators per analyzed context unit

When it comes to deterministic indicators of communication, three in particular stand out as being the most common: First of all, the most frequently encountered indicators, which show an occurrence rate of 42% of all determinism indicators, were those that represent already existing or known products that bear little to no innovative potential. In this context, Facebook is the most influential platform followed by corporate websites. Secondly, indicators of internal structural rigidity are the second most frequent determinism indicators with an occurrence rate of 22% among all other indicators. Facebook was found to be the number one diffusion platform for this purpose, followed by Instagram. Thirdly, content showing competitive parity contributed to 17% of all encountered deterministic indicators. These indicators were mostly found on corporate websites and on Instagram. Compared to strategic choice indicators,

patterns between individual context units and deterministic content were more difficult to establish. One assumption for this circumstance might lie in the practical approach of corporations' communications departments: Content related to strategic choice could have a higher chance of being deliberately communicated by the respective companies as the concept of strategic choice has significantly influenced common strategic management concepts used by corporations worldwide (e.g., Ansoff, 1957; Barney, 1991; Chen & Miller, 2015; Porter, 1985; Rumelt, 1982; Thiétart, 2005). This, in turn, might have led to the generation of standardized patterns regarding what to communicate on which communication channels following established theoretical and practical concepts. However, because determinism has had lower degrees of influence on strategic management and is thus more likely to be a concept that practitioners have less knowledge about than strategic choice (Bourgeois, 1984), an understanding of determinism as a concept within the field of communication is probably not as established as the concept of strategic choice. In turn, this lack of understanding or even ignorance of the concept of determinism within communications might be the reason why patterns regarding the usage of determinism indicators did not emerge with the same level of clarity as did those of strategic choice indicators.

A detailed exploration concerning possible interrelationships between strategic choice and types of corporate communication strategies is explored in chapter 6.

6. Discussion

This chapter has four objectives: Firstly, to identify correlations between the results presented in the previous chapter in order to generate hypotheses that answer and support the research questions set forth in this thesis. Secondly, to discuss if and how the above-mentioned research questions have been successfully answered and propose academic as well as practical implications based on the gathered insights and assumptions. Moreover, parallels are drawn and differences are identified with regards to already existing literature on the topic. Thirdly, possible limitations on the validity and significance of the developed results and established hypotheses are specified. Finally, potential for further research and recommendations to that effect are proposed.

6.1. Generation of Hypotheses

This chapter serves as a detailed reflection of all research questions defined and examined in this Master's Thesis through the examination of correlations between the results of this thesis' main fields of research, communication strategies and the concepts of strategic choice and determinism. Furthermore, as a result of discussing the research findings, several hypotheses are established using the following methodology: Firstly, communication strategy results of organizations are evaluated along the strategic choice – determinism continuum: Those companies which predominantly score within the area of strategic choice are compared, with regards to the distribution of their digital corporate communication strategy, to those which show dominant levels of determinism. In case of relevant discoveries, potential correlation analyses on the indicator level are supplemented.

It should be noted that, because of this chapter's main differentiation criterion, which is represented by whether a corporation is located on the side of either "strategic choice" or "determinism" on the strategic choice-determinism continuum, those companies which show no prevalence for either state (i.e., those which are located exactly in the middle of the continuum with a fifty-fifty distribution of strategic choice and determinism) cannot be considered in this chapter's hypothesis creation processes. In particular, this means that one company (i.e., Lisec Holding), which does not fulfill the above-mentioned criterion is not part of any of this chapter's considerations and analyses.

It has been established that, for the purpose of this Master's Thesis, a difference of 10% at either the communication strategy or the indicator level is significant enough to indicate noteworthy correlations and thus warrant the establishment of hypotheses.

6.1.1. Stakeholder-based Corporate Communication Strategy through the Lens of Strategic Choice and Determinism

On the level of dominant communication strategy typologies, no correlations between high levels of strategic choice/determinism and stakeholder-based communication strategies have been found, because, as already illustrated in the results section, the digital communication channels analyzed in this thesis are largely targeted at external stakeholders. However, if the same analysis is done at the indicator level, a clear correlation in this regard can be made, namely the connection between deterministic companies/strategic choosers and their corporate communication target audiences. The differences in stakeholder-based indicators are illustrated in the table below.

Target stakeholders	Results of predominantly deterministic corporations	Results of predominantly strategically choosing corporations
Communities	3%	1%
Customers	53%	18%
Employees	5%	5%
External	30%	60%
Governments	1%	4%
New partners	1%	1%
NGOs and activists	3%	4%
Partners	3%	0%
Potential employees	8%	11%
Shareholders	1%	4%

Table 45: Comparison of stakeholder-based indicators with regards to corporations' positions on the strategic choice – determinism continuum

The above table clearly shows that those corporations which overwhelmingly feature deterministic communication levels focus on customers as the main targets of their stakeholder-based communication strategy (with 53% of all communication directed specifically at customers), while those corporations which have been evaluated as having strategic choice primarily employ a multi-stakeholder communication strategy (with 60% of the analyzed communication aimed at all kinds of potential audiences). These correlations lead to the formation of the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1.1.: Companies with high levels of strategic choice are more likely to focus their digital corporate communication on addressing several stakeholders at once compared to companies showing dominant degrees of determinism.

Hypothesis 1.2.: Companies characterized by a majority of deterministic influences rather tend to target customers as their main corporate communication stakeholder group compared to companies featuring significant degrees of strategic choice.

6.1.2. Content-based Corporate Communication Strategy through the Lens of Strategic Choice and Determinism

Regarding content-based communication strategies, the differences in results between companies with high strategic choice versus those with high determinism were large enough to warrant correlations in the case of expertise and image strategy usage. Concerning hybrid strategies, the usage rates are minuscule and therefore irrelevant for establishing hypotheses. The following table compares content-based strategy distributions for companies with high strategic choice to those with high determinism.

Types of organizations	Content-based communication strategies		
	Expertise	Image	Hybrid
Companies showing high strategic choice	48%	45%	6%
Companies showing high determinism	64%	31%	4%

Table 46: Comparison of content-based communication strategy distributions with regards to corporations' positions on the strategic choice – determinism continuum

As observed from the above table, corporations featuring high strategic choice show a more balanced usage distribution of expertise and image-based strategies as opposed to more deterministic companies, which generally focus their content on showing expertise and neglect image strategies in return. These correlations lead to the following hypotheses regarding content-based communication strategies and strategic choice/determinism:

Hypothesis 2.1.: Corporations featuring high levels of strategic choice are more likely to utilize image communication strategies as compared to those companies with high rates of determinism when creating content for digital corporate communication.

Hypothesis 2.2.: Corporations marked by high degrees of determinism more frequently employ expertise communication strategies in contrast to those having high strategic choice when creating content for digital corporate communication.

In order to further supplement the above correlations and further particularize the established hypotheses on content-based communication strategies in connection with strategic

choice/determinism, the correlation analysis was also carried out on the indicator level. Table 47 acts as an illustration of this process.

Content-based communication strategies	Content-based indicators	Distributions of predominantly deterministic corporations	Distributions of predominantly strategically choosing corporations
Expertise communication strategy	Company expertise	1%	9%
	Company products/services	45%	11%
	Company projects	2%	1%
	Company strategy and strategic decisions	2%	6%
	Company success	1%	3%
	General information and news on company	8%	9%
	References	2%	2%
Image communication strategy	Educational commitment	1%	1%
	Employee involvement, development, opportunities	17%	17%
	Entertainment	5%	0%
	Environmental stewardship and sustainability efforts	4%	5%
	Event attendance	0%	2%
	Industry specific topics of interest or controversy	3%	1%
	Philanthropic commitment	2%	3%
	Sponsorship	2%	22%
Hybrid communication strategy	Hybrid indicators	5%	7%

Table 47: Comparison of content-based indicators with regards to corporations' positions on the strategic choice – determinism continuum

The above side-by-side comparison demonstrates that two content-based indicators in particular stand out. These are, on the one hand, indicators showing company products/services and, on the other, sponsorship. These two types of indicators are thus the main causes for the previously explored differences in expertise and image-based strategy usage of strategically choosing and deterministic companies. As highlighted in the above table, the content of predominantly deterministic corporations consists of 45% product/service presentations compared to 11% for strategic choosers. Moreover, 22% of companies showing high levels of strategic choice have employed sponsorship content compared to merely 2% of analyzed deterministic companies. Furthermore, although this particular comparison does not

constitute a relevant correlation, it is noteworthy that both deterministic and strategically choosing companies showed a relatively high usage rate and, at the same time, equal proportion of employee-related indicators (i.e., 17%). This similarity indicates the existence of a universal emphasis when it comes to organizations' positioning as attractive (prospective) employers. Nevertheless, the additional correlations identified above lead to two more hypotheses concerning content-based strategies of relevant companies:

Hypothesis 2.3.: Companies which show high levels of determinism are more likely to feature content showcasing their products and/or services than companies which are primarily characterized by strategic choice.

Hypothesis 2.4.: The higher the level of strategic choice and the lower the degree of determinism of a particular company, the more likely that particular company is to diffuse content featuring corporate sponsorship activities on its digital communication channels.

6.1.3. Objective-based Corporate Communication Strategy through the Lens of Strategic Choice and Determinism

Similar to the conclusion of the previous chapter, differences between deterministic and strategically choosing companies were only significant enough for two objective-based strategies, namely informational and persuasive strategies, as the difference in usage of involvement strategies amounted to merely 2%. Possible reasons as to why both strategically choosing and deterministic companies displayed similar levels of involvement strategy usage might result from the fact that the analyzed set of data was extracted exclusively from digital communication channels, which are generally appropriate for involvement strategies due to their potential of creating two-way-communication (Cornelissen, 2014). Therefore, the results of objective-based communication strategies lead to the establishment of two main hypotheses, as displayed within the following table.

	Objective-based communication strategies		
	Informational	Persuasive	Involvement
Companies showing high strategic choice	49%	12%	40%
Companies showing high determinism	31%	32%	38%

Table 48: Comparison of objective-based communication strategy distribution with regards to corporations' positions on the strategic choice – determinism continuum

Observing the above results, almost 50% of companies with high strategic choice strive to inform their stakeholders, as opposed to 31% of deterministic corporations. However, while

only 12% of strategically choosing companies follow the objective of persuading stakeholders, 32% of the more deterministically influenced companies follow this strategy when designing and executing their digital corporate communication strategies. The hypotheses formed as a result of these correlations are:

Hypothesis 3.1.: Informational corporate communication strategies are more likely to be used by companies with high strategic choice than by deterministic companies.

Hypothesis 3.2.: Corporations showing predominantly deterministic influences as opposed to high degrees of strategic choice more frequently engage in persuasive communication than the latter.

Although the correlation indicator analysis for objective-based communication strategies through the lens of strategic choice and determinism did not yield differences as significant as in the case of content-based strategies, the disparities depicted in the next table still warrant consideration as supplementary hypotheses to those established above.

Objective-based communication strategies	Objective-based indicators	Distributions of predominantly deterministic corporations	Distributions of predominantly strategically choosing corporations
Informational	Factual information	24%	38%
	Announcement	2%	4%
	Report	1%	2%
Persuasive	Offer	17%	8%
	Promotion	15%	4%
Involvement	Attention seeking	17%	27%
	Direct interactions	24%	17%

Table 49: Comparison of objective-based indicators with regards to corporations' positions on the strategic choice – determinism continuum

Comparing the two different types of corporations' discrepancies in terms of indicators of objective-based communication strategies, one of the two most considerable differences can be observed in the case of factual information usage, which constitutes 38% of strategic choosers' digital communication usage distribution compared to deterministic companies' 24%. Furthermore, promotional indicators are used by 15% of deterministic companies and 4% of those showing higher levels of strategic choice. Moreover, while relatively notable differences in terms of corporations' differences in involvement strategy indicators were identified, they are not significant enough to justify the generation of hypotheses, as corresponding deviations did not score above 10%. Nevertheless, it is mentionable that

organizations with high levels of strategic choice tend to prefer the use of attention seeking communication while organizations characterized by high degrees of determinism are more prone to relying on direct interactions with stakeholders.

Finally, on the basis of this correlation analysis, the two last hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 3.3.: Corporations which have higher levels of strategic choice tend to, on average, focus more on providing factual information to potential stakeholders via digital communication than deterministic companies.

Hypothesis 3.4.: Companies which are primarily determined by their environment are more likely to use (self-)promotional content to communicate with their stakeholders on digital channels as compared to companies which have the ability to determine their environment.

6.2. Discussion of Research Questions

This thesis' research questions, which are to be thoroughly summarized and discussed, are as follows:

- *What role does strategic choice versus determinism play when it comes to organizations' digital communication strategies?*
- *How are the relevant elements of companies' digital communication strategies influenced by companies' positions on the strategic choice-determinism continuum?*
- *What patterns can be identified when comparing digital communication strategies of companies with high levels of strategic choice to those which are more deterministic?*

Firstly, these questions are answered using insights gathered from the previous chapter: Based on the differences between companies showing high strategic choice as compared to those having high degrees of determinism, which have led to the creation of several hypotheses, the role of the state of behavioral freedom of a given company is arguably quite substantial when it comes to how that particular company communicates through its digital channels. This importance is reflected by the results of the correlation analysis, which has established the influence of strategic choice/determinism on all strategic aspects of digital corporate communication covered in this Master's Thesis: The stakeholder, content and objective-based corporate communication strategies. Among those, it can be argued that the role of strategic choice versus determinism is weightier when it comes to the content and the objectives of corporations' communication strategies as opposed to strategies based on targeted stakeholders. Firstly, the reason for that lies in the findings which show considerable differences between the usage distribution of content and objective-based strategies, while no noteworthy differences have crystallized regarding how stakeholder-based strategies are employed. Also, while it is true that, based on the findings, deterministic companies are more likely to directly target consumers while strategic choosers prefer a multi-stakeholder-approach, the fact that consumers are also part of the "multi-stakeholder-approach" and vice-versa, leads to strategic choice and determinism becoming weaker influencers of stakeholder-based communication strategy in this regard. And, because the two different types of corporations have employed more heterogeneous indicators for their objective and image-based communication strategies, the dominant state of a company being either strategic choice or determinism is more impactful in these particular cases. Having clarified the less influential role of strategic choice and determinism for stakeholder-based communication

strategies, this circumstance is also explored in the case of objective and content-based strategies.

When it comes to content-based strategies, the role of strategic choice was found to be a driver for the diffusion of image-based content (i.e., displaying the company as a positive and valuable member of society) on digital channels. Determinism, on the other hand, is considered to promote the communication of expertise-related content (i.e., company know-how, products or services presented in a value-adding way to stakeholders). Furthermore, because these strategic sub-typologies are parts of the same strategic main typology (i.e., content-based strategy), strategic choice and determinism are, at the same time, also constraining the usage of expertise and image communication strategies, respectively. As far as actual content is concerned, strategic choice tends to increase the usage of content displaying corporations' sponsorship activities while determinism leads to a greater focus of distributing content dealing with company services and/or products. Strategic choice and determinism also play different roles when it comes to establishing objectives of communication strategies. One of them is that strategic choice leads to a higher rate of using communication strategies that strives to inform stakeholders rather than persuade them, while determinism promotes the utilization of the latter at the expense of providing factual information to organizations' online audiences. In more detail, this thesis' results have established that high levels of strategic choice promote the usage of digital content in the form of factual information while dominant degrees of determinism show higher rates of using promotional content and direct offers for products or services.

Regarding digital communication channels, while it may be true that, in proportion, those companies characterized by high strategic choice versus those showing high levels of determinism more frequently use two social media platforms in particular (i.e., LinkedIn and Twitter), and this circumstance might theoretically constitute some form of correlation, there are multiple other potential factors (e.g., company, industry and geography-related factors) that might influence this relationship, which leads to the assumption that strategic choice/determinism has no causal relationship to the choice of digital communication channels. The fact that this thesis' research methodology involving the different communication strategy typologies was set up as a "closed circle" which allowed for the comparison of different companies along the same pre-defined variables implies a more significant degree of causality between strategic choice/determinism and corporate communication strategies as defined in this thesis compared to the choice of digital corporate communication channels.

Finally, it should be added that each piece of knowledge extracted from previous literature and comprising this thesis' literature review was essential to answering the research questions by providing the theoretical framework for designing the methodology used to conduct research. Therefore, by discussing research questions using both the generated hypotheses as well as other results from the research that was undertaken, connections between this thesis' results and the literature review have been established.

6.3. Academic Implications

First and foremost, although this literature review and exploratory empirical part done via content analysis does possess several limitations, it contributes to the extant research dealing with strategic choice/determinism and corporate communication strategies. The particularities of this contribution are explored in this chapter:

Although no prior literature on the topic of analyzing corporate communication strategies through the framework provided by the concepts of strategic choice and determinism exists, several points of relevance and context have been identified between this thesis' research results and previous results, insights or hypotheses from existing literature used in the literature review. While these contextual relations are not fully relevant to this thesis' research questions, other results of this Master's Thesis, especially those concerning communication strategies as a separate field, are investigated and thus legitimacy for the validity and academic as well as practical relevance of this Master's Thesis is provided. Nevertheless, discussions on the impact of this thesis' results on strategic choice and determinism literature are also provided later in this subchapter.

Firstly, various parallels of this thesis' content-based communication strategy related results can be drawn to those of Sora Kim and Rader (2010). As the methodology used in that particular study was partly adopted for this thesis' methodology, the following comparisons are conceptually justified. In particular, Sora Kim and Rader (2010, p. 70) have found out that Fortune 500 organizations firstly use CAb strategies and, secondly, CSR strategies. The results of this thesis show some degree of similarity, as expertise strategies followed by image strategies have been found to be the most popular content-based strategies with hybrid strategies being a rare choice. Another similarity was found on the level of indicators, as both the compared results and this thesis' results featured mostly expertise-related indicators in the form of corporate product or service presentations. This semblance might imply a pattern of corporations' preferred digital communication strategies when it comes to online content. However, compared to this thesis' results, findings of Sora Kim and Rader (2010) showed a

lower proportion of expertise strategies within content-based strategies on websites. This circumstance may be indicative of a potential development of corporate digital communication channels: It could be argued that, in 2010, corporate websites were corporations' most central and important digital communication channels and thus had to accommodate the entire execution of content-based corporate communication strategies. However, as social networks began their advent as leading online social media channels fueled by drastically increasing user numbers worldwide, corporations' digital communication strategies may have adapted to that process and thus strategies once reserved for websites only (i.e., image-based strategies) shifted towards social media because of its direct interaction potential, leaving corporate websites to employ more focused expertise-based strategies. Possible interpretations resulting from comparing the results of this thesis to those of Sora Kim and Rader (2010) are, however, limited by the fact that the latter used corporate websites only while this thesis also included social networks. Furthermore, Sora Kim and Rader (2010) had a greater research set consisting of the Fortune 500 companies of that time. The fact that, at the time of the research of Sora Kim and Rader (2010), social networks were significantly less frequently used and websites thus had a higher significance within corporations' digital communication strategy, is also noteworthy.

Further comparisons of this thesis' results were conducted with those of Sora Kim et al. (2014), who analyzed 41 Fortune 100 corporations' Facebook communication strategies according to the same content-based communication strategy typology as Sora Kim and Rader (2010). Firstly, the research conducted in this thesis can be seen as an answer to the identified potential for further research by Sora Kim et al. (2014), who recommended additional research related to communication strategies on companies other than those within the Fortune 100 and on other digital channels than merely Facebook. Furthermore, because this thesis' methodology is in part based on Sora Kim et al. (2014), the following comparison is contextually possible. Sora Kim et al. (2014, p. 355) have found out that their analyzed Fortune 100 corporations primarily used corporate ability strategies, followed by CSR strategies and, lastly, hybrid strategies. The results of this thesis yielded the same order of results, although image strategies (which would be called CSR strategies using the definition of Sora Kim et al. (2014)) were much more prominent in the present results. Nevertheless, this arguably strong similarity between results is reason enough to further strengthen the explanatory power of this thesis' results, especially those regarding content-based communication strategies. The results of Sora Kim et al. (2014) offer more potential for discussion: For example, their indicator analysis placed corporations' products as the most frequently used corporate ability indicator on Facebook, which accurately reflects this thesis' results, leading to another similarity. Moreover, Sora Kim et al. (2014, p. 355) discovered that consumers are the most addressed

stakeholder group of their analyzed companies on Facebook, which represents the same outcome as this thesis. One discrepancy found during the results' comparison is, however, the issue that, unlike in Sora Kim et al. (2014), who found that most CSR-based indicators on FB were philanthropic contributions, this thesis' results primarily observed indicators showing employee involvement, development and opportunities. In conclusion, the similarity of this thesis' results to those of Sora Kim et al. (2014) show that, as far as content-based communication strategies on Facebook are concerned, the general situation has not changed since 2014. Relevant changes, however, include a rise in image-based strategies. These changes, however, could be explained by the general shifts in communication over time. Nevertheless, the above comparisons are limited by the U.S.-centric nature of companies analyzed by Sora Kim et al. (2014).

In conclusion, the above comparisons with scholarly research results of peer-reviewed articles used in the literature review increases the legitimacy of this thesis' research results, at least when it comes to content-based and, partially, to stakeholder-based information strategies. Regarding objective-based communication strategy results, no direct comparison to other academic research results were possible because none were found employing research methodologies comparable to those used in this thesis. However, the existence and utilization of informational, persuasive and involvement strategies, as proposed by Cornelissen (2014) and Morsing and Schultz (2006), as corporate digital communication strategies utilized by companies both active in Austria and worldwide has clearly been proven by the results of this thesis' empirical part. Furthermore, the universal adaption of involvement strategies by corporations active on social media, promoting two-way-communication between corporations and their various stakeholders, as proposed and shown by Capriotti (2011), Colleoni (2013) and Mills (2012) has further been validated by the results of this research.

In the interest of accurately discussing the results' relevancy to existing literature on strategic choice and determinism used in this thesis' literature review, already stated fundamental knowledge on strategic choice and determinism is revisited: The central issue existing in strategic choice versus determinism, which is the question of the source of decisional power, leads to the assumption that companies have to be significantly different in many aspects (e.g., regarding their internal structures, market presence, way of doing business, communication, etc.) depending on which of the two viewpoints is chosen. The reasons for these differences, which have been extensively covered in the literature review, have been directly adopted into the research methodology used in this empirical part, which is the rationale as to why it was possible to analyze communication strategies "through the lens of strategic choice versus determinism" in the first place. Consequently, the results of the correlation analysis (between

representations of strategic choice/determinism and corporate communication strategies) and hypotheses generated at the beginning of this chapter are essential to answering whether or not this thesis' assumption of strategic choice and determinism showing clear differences with regards to their communication strategies is indeed fulfilled. And, the generated hypotheses clearly confirm the assumed differences related to the usage of corporate communication strategies in a way that warrants the distinction between strategic choice and determinism. It is important to note that there are several limitations to the generated hypotheses, such as the limits placed by the definition of strategic choice and determinism within the literature review of this thesis. However, the most impactful limitation to the generated hypotheses lies in the fact that states of strategic choice and determinism have been evaluated by interpreting digital corporate communication, not by evaluating internal or external firm performance. Potential deviations resulting from companies' self-presentations versus their actual performance are entirely possible. Nevertheless, evaluations of performance were out of this thesis' scope, as defined in the chapter "Delimitations".

The methodology used in this Master's Thesis guaranteed an accurate method of comparing two relatively unrelated fields of research and their theoretical implications. Therefore, it is important to add that, as linkages between the two fields of research (strategic choice/determinism and corporate communication) are not common, no academic implications can currently be stated to that effect. However, this thesis has effectively proposed a new dimension of understanding how and why corporations communicate with their publics the way they do. Whether or not this new dimension holds any significant value for future scholarly works on this combination of topics, remains to be seen. Therefore, these unexplored academic fields may offer potential for further research, which is explored further in the chapter 6.5. Prior to that, however, the next chapter explores possible practical implications.

6.4. Practical Implications

The results displayed in this Master's Thesis may be used by practitioners as information detailing the status-quo of corporate communication strategies of mostly internationally active corporations. While the results cannot be seen as generalized representations, several communication-related patterns on social media and corporate websites were observed, which might provide useful for general comparisons of digital communication compositions or any other related usage.

Aside from its data-driven informational value, this thesis provides practitioners with two ready-to-use theory-backed models for analyzing digital corporate communication and states of

strategic choice/determinism. The methodology, including its indicators and their analysis, has been defined in such a way that it is universally applicable to every type of corporation concerning the selected digital communication channels and, provided that additional fine-tuning is done, other channels might be analyzed as well.

Similar to the considerations regarding academic implications, the most innovative practical implication stems from the introduction of the concepts of strategic choice and determinism to corporate communication. Effectively, a new dimension of understanding corporate communication has been proposed, and with it, potential for corporations to optimize their communication strategies: For example, by analyzing a corporation's digital corporate communication strategies and subsequently establishing its location on the strategic choice – determinism continuum, then comparing the results, it is possible for organizations to review whether or not their employed communication strategies match their strategic choice/determinism position. A mismatch might indicate that corporations' true strengths and weaknesses are not effectively communicated to their targeted stakeholders, thereby lowering the overall effectiveness of their marketing and communication efforts and, ultimately, minimizing the potential corporate success by reducing the metrics affected by corporations' corporate communication functions. Moreover, required changes in the utilized (digital) communication channels may be identified: By identifying corporations' states of strategic choice/determinism, it is possible to assess if corporations' portfolio of digital communication channels is adequate and, if not, which changes likely have to be undertaken in this regard. For instance, if a corporation showing high levels of strategic choice is not on LinkedIn or Twitter (which have been shown to exhibit the highest concentrations of communication favoring strategic choice), a possible move towards these channels might be considered. What is more, as the proposed models allow for eye-level comparisons between all sorts of corporations, a comparison with particularly interesting competitors or benchmark market/industry players might provide more insights into potential performance-related deviations. As it can be seen, the applications of the proposed models and insights resulting from this novel method of regarding corporate communication are numerous and its potential is definitely not maxed out or yet known. While it may sound far-fetched given the current state of this research, the proposed model may be able to generate value in a way that other currently established strategic management concepts generate, such as competitive business strategies (Porter, 1985), resource-based strategies (Barney, 1991), corporate diversification strategies (Rumelt, 1982), strategic mixes (Thiétart, 2005), cooperative strategies (Chen & Miller, 2015), market- or product-based strategies (Ansoff, 1957) and other comparable concepts. However, until such utopic scenarios can even remotely come true, considerably

more research efforts toward understanding the actual effectiveness, value and legitimacy of the proposed methodology would have to devoted.

6.5. Limitations and Potential for Further Research

There are several limitations that must be taken into account considering the examination of this thesis' assumptions, analyses, results, insights and generated hypotheses. Firstly, the potential for generalizing the results of the present research is reduced because only 25 companies' Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter profiles as well as corporate websites have been analyzed. It must be noted that, in case of the chosen social media profiles, only posts during the last 30 days before the date of observation have been analyzed and, concerning corporate websites, only the front pages of said websites were the objects of research. Therefore, although a significant sample size of 112 context units (i.e., social media profiles and corporate websites) containing 813 coding units (i.e., posts on social media and elements of websites) has been analyzed resulting in a total of 3324 identified indicators, additional research which explores more context units containing a higher number of coding units within a longer time span and, regarding websites, additional webpages, is recommended. What is more, although all companies have been subject to the same research criteria, it should be noted that the amount of coding units, on which the basis of all relevant results have been calculated, vary amongst the analyzed companies. This obviously translates into more detailed representations and thus evaluations of companies such as Red Bull GmbH (having the maximum possible number of 50 coding units) as compared to, for example, Doppler Mineralöle GmbH (possessing 10 relevant coding units on their corporate website only). Moreover, although the exclusion of YouTube as channel of analysis was a deliberate choice because of its sharing usage on the analyzed social media platforms, research on this particular social and video platform might yield additional valuable results. Furthermore, research including a larger sample of corporations might offer more and deeper knowledge on the still largely unresearched combined field of strategic choice and determinism in combination with (digital) communication strategies.

Another range of limitations result from the theoretical basis of the developed research methodology provided by this thesis' literature review: Although the maximum possible effort has been put into using the most relevant peer-reviewed literature from both the field of corporate communication and strategic choice/determinism, the possibility of usage of different literature on the subjects, resulting in other research methodologies, is given. For example, typologies of communication strategies or strategic choice/determinism classifications might also be feasible in different scales and forms. It must, however, be noted that, due to the

exploratory nature of this thesis, it was possible to contextually compare two previously largely unrelated fields of research. As a consequence, this thesis has put forward a never-before-seen method of classifying, understanding and comparing (digital) corporate communication strategies. Therefore, many of the stated limitations are a result of this thesis' investigative approach. Because of the current low level of knowledge concerning strategic choice/determinism and their effects on corporate communication strategies, formulations of different methodologies compared to those used in this thesis would represent high potential for further research. In any case, further research is definitely needed in order to evaluate whether or not this proposed new perspective holds any value for both scientific and practical applications.

Limitations regarding the method of performing the data selection and collection phase should be mentioned as well: A major part of the process was carried out by using Storyclash, a social media monitoring and analytics software (further details can be found on <https://www.storyclash.com/>). This means that, on the one hand, data selection and collection for all context units on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have been carried out through Storyclash, while, on the other hand, corporate websites and LinkedIn profiles have been analyzed without the use of dedicated social media software. In all cases, it was possible to carry out the entire process according to the criteria established in the appropriate chapter. However, it is noteworthy to mention a possible limitation resulting from the fact that LinkedIn context units were analyzed without the use of the aforementioned software (because the software did not support activity monitoring on LinkedIn at the time when the research process was carried out and, no other suitable software was discovered): The settings of Storyclash were set up to indicate all interactions with posts of the selected social media profiles within the selected time period ranked by the number of total interactions with social media posts. While the greatest possible efforts were made in order to ensure the same quality of data selection and collection without the use of the software on LinkedIn and any notable differences in quality are highly unlikely, risks of deviations in data quality between the dedicated software-driven process and the human-driven process cannot be completely excluded. Similarly, it is also not possible to rule out the potential of technical issues resulting in unfavorable effects on the research results, although such scenarios are again highly unlikely. Finally, regarding the same phase of the research process carried out on corporate website, it should be pointed out that the selection of website coding units was at the sole discretion of this thesis' author.

7. Conclusion

By reviewing and combining relevant insights from high-quality literature on the field of corporate communication, this Master's Thesis has introduced a multi-faceted framework for analyzing corporate communication along the three dimensions of target stakeholders, communication content and objectives. Within this framework, 3 main strategic corporate communication typologies and 8 sub-typologies of corporate communication strategies were introduced. These are: Stakeholder-based corporate communication strategy classified into external and internal communication strategies; Content-based corporate communication strategy consisting of expertise, image and hybrid communication strategies; Objective-based communication strategy categorized as informational, persuasive and involvement communication strategies. Therefore, this Master's Thesis provides interested readers with a comprehensive perspective covering a broad and interconnected spectrum of corporate communication strategies. In effect, this part of the thesis' literature review acts not only as a critical summary, but also as a new practically-oriented combination of existing established concepts from the research field of corporate communications (e.g., Sora Kim & Rader, 2010; Mitchell et al., 1997; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Steyn, 2004).

Furthermore, this Master's Thesis has proposed a framework for identifying strategic choice and determinism within corporations from digital corporate communication by reviewing and synthesizing high-quality literature on the two aforementioned concepts. In this context, the two contrasting but interrelated concepts were reviewed from the perspective of individual organizations, i.e. the micro-level, as well as entire markets or industries, i.e., the macro-level, respectively. As a result, a framework in the form of a continuum between strategic choice and determinism has been developed. Therefore, the second part of this Master's Thesis' literature review serves not only as an extensive and detailed overview of two key concepts from the fields of organizational science and strategic management, but also as an enhanced theoretical and practical model based on a selected range of prior foundational literature covering the concepts of strategic choice and determinism (e.g., Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984; Child, 1972, 1997; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Miles & Snow, 1984).

In the interest of pursuing this thesis' research questions and fulfilling its assumptions regarding potential correlations between companies with high levels of strategic choice/low levels of determinism (and vice versa) and their corporate communication strategies, empirical research was undertaken: Firstly, indicators for evaluating corporate communication strategies and interpreting organizations' positions on the strategic choice – determinism continuum were

designed based on as well as inspired by existing literature. Through the appropriate research methodology, the two aforementioned theoretical frameworks were contextually combined, and research was undertaken using content analysis. The scope of the content analysis encompassed 25 corporations (based on a random selection of the top 500 corporations doing business in Austria) on 5 different digital communication channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, corporate websites). The finished content analysis featured a total analysis of 112 context units (i.e., corporate social media profiles and websites) containing 813 coding units (i.e., social media posts and corporate website elements) possessing a total of 3324 analyzed indicators. While the analyzed data was not numerous enough to offer generalized hypotheses, it was significant enough to warrant the generation of 10 hypotheses.

In conclusion, the analysis and resulting generated hypotheses within this Master's Thesis confirm the assumption of significant differences concerning the usage of corporate communication strategies between companies characterized by either high strategic choice or high determinism. Although this thesis is subject to several limitations, its results show definitive linkages to existing literature on corporate communication (Sora Kim et al., 2014; Sora Kim & Rader, 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006) as well as implications for both academics and practitioners. What is more, the introduction of an unprecedented method of analyzing corporate communication and measuring states of strategic choice and determinism shows considerable potential for further research on the topic. Strategic choice versus determinism has, since its beginning, represented a central debate within organizational studies (Astley & van de Ven, 1983; Child, 1997; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Whittington, 1988) and this thesis has shown that its implications affect the field of corporate communication in several novel ways. In effect, this Master's Thesis has introduced a new dimension for analyzing corporate communication strategies and, in order to understand its true potential for generating value in organizations, further research is needed.

8. List of References

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