Social Media and Civic Engagement

How social media is used by a civic engagement initiative in the context of the refugee crisis

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Abstract

With over one million refugees arriving in Europe in 2015, countries have entered a state of emergency as they struggle to cope with the continent's greatest migration wave since the aftermath of the second World War. In this context, grassroots initiatives are stepping in where political administrations are failing and capacities are exhausted. Mobilization has been exceptionally large in Germany, where hundreds of grassroots initiatives were born all over the country under the common slogan "Refugees Welcome". The vast majority of them is characterized by their shared use of social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, which have played a key role in organizing and mobilizing the efforts of thousands of citizens. With a slowdown of the refugee crisis not in near sight, the grassroots initiatives are constantly trying to find new innovative ways of using those digital platforms to their advantages in order to meet their challenges. In this context, new forms of civic engagement emerge that translate to a successful use of social media for civic mobilization purposes.

The goal of this study was to understand how social media are used by such an initiative in the context of the refugee crisis. With the aim of providing a holistic picture of how social media are used by a grassroots initiative, firstly, it was investigated how different online platforms are used by identifying what messages are circulated through them for what purpose. Secondly, it was examined why those platforms are used in a certain way by identifying reasons and motivations behind this specific social media use.

Using the example of one particular case of civic activism through social media (i.e. the Berlin-based initiative *Moabit helps*), this research was approached from a case study perspective. By combining a qualitative content analysis of their Facebook page, Facebook group, Twitter page and website, as well as in-depth interviews with initiators and volunteers,

the actual practices of social media usage were assessed as well as reasons and motivations for this specific usage examined.

The findings of this study showed that the context of the refugee crisis shapes the nature of the social media use in some ways more than in others. Through positive and negative experiences on the different online platforms, strategies are formed over time. While the divisive nature of the refugee issue and its outcomes such as right-wing extremism led to a limited informational usage of the public Facebook page, the closed nature of the Facebook group functions as a safe space that encourages dialogue and is primarily being used for mobilization purposes through the group's swarm intelligence. While Twitter is still mainly used as a complementary channel for reaching new audiences, the people working at *Moabit helps* consider it a learning process. Due to its limited maintenance compared to the social media platforms, the purpose of the website within the online environment of *Moabit helps* remains questionable and may be a predictor of how websites might lose their relevance within the broader picture of future communication practices in civic activism.

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1. Introduction

With over one million refugees arriving in Europe in 2015, countries have entered a state of emergency as they struggle to cope with the continent's greatest migration movement since the aftermath of World War Two (Kingsley, 2015). According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, the vast majority of refugees come from countries in the middle of humanitarian crises or military conflict and are escaping the war, violence or persecution in their home countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n. d.). Within Europe, opinions are deeply divided over how best to deal with this increasing influx of migrants and countries argue over how best to resettle them (Nolan, 2015).

As European governments are struggling under the refugee crisis, grassroots initiatives are stepping in where political administrations are failing and capacities are exhausted. Mobilization has been exceptionally huge in Germany, where the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees reported approximately 476.000 registered asylum seekers in 2015 alone (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2016) and refugee aid organizations announced an up to 70 percent increase in volunteers (Hornig & Popp, 2015). Under the label of a new "welcoming culture" and the common slogan "Refugees Welcome", hundreds of initiatives were born all over Germany in reaction to this state of emergency.

The vast majority of these grassroots initiatives is characterized by their shared use of digital technologies and social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, which have played a key role in organizing and mobilizing the efforts of thousands of citizens and spreading awareness on the issue of the refugee crisis ("Flüchtlinge Willkommen", 2015). The support has thereby taken on forms such as job-matching online platforms for refugees in Germany, crowdfunding websites, online petitions or smartphone apps that provide information for refugees to facilitate their journey and communication. Besides that, countless initiatives were set up on Facebook and Twitter with the purpose of spreading calls to action and organizing instant emergency aid, many of which quickly grew beyond their initial small-scale intentions (Comes & Van de Walle, 2015). While some of those grassroots initiatives use social media to match citizens willing to share their homes with refugees in need of accommodations (Elgot, 2015), others use social media for offering German language courses or for supporting refugees by helping them to connect with existing social services.

This widespread use of social media under circumstances such as the refugee crisis illustrates how the rise of social media within the past decade has enabled new forms of civic engagement and political participation. Today, new opportunities emerge for citizens to participate in society as the accessibility of the Internet allows everybody to become a participant in this digital landscape. For instance, social media such as social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter) as well as content-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube) allow people with less social influence to engage as citizens in political life as well (Dahlgren, 2009). In that sense, the ability of social media to reach new audiences could increase the visibility of relevant issues in society such as public health, political uprisings or climate change.

Social media thus not only appear to be tools that allows communication across geographical boundaries, but also to organize activism, as can be seen in the case of prominent movements such as the Arab Spring revolutions or Occupy Wall Street and less well-known grassroots initiatives on a local level. These examples of social media use for successful civic mobilization purposes have drawn attention to whether social media can play a role in engaging citizens and if the case, what this role specifically entails. More and more grassroots initiatives have therefore started to explore this potentiality of social media in the hope of achieving success with regard to their own goals.

The grassroots initiatives established through social media during the refugee crisis explore this potentiality by using social media for their common goal of helping refugees in need. This context of the refugee crisis makes the majority of those initiatives cases of humanitarian aid. Whether it is finding alternative housing for refugees, offering language courses or assisting with administrational procedures, the primary goal of those initiatives operating in this context is to help others in need and to mobilize other people to follow their example.

While some of the grassroots initiatives have remained small in size and impact, others have found the support of thousands of followers all over the country and made a name for themselves. With a slowdown of the refugee crisis not in near sight, they are constantly trying to find new innovative ways of using social media to their advantages in order to meet the challenges. In this context, new interesting forms of civic engagement have emerged that translate to a successful use of social media for civic mobilization, that are worth researching.

1.1 Research Question

The goal of this study is to map out the use of social media by civic activists in the context of the refugee crisis and to understand which role social media play in promoting awareness for this relevant social issue, and how social media are used in the context of such an initiative by both activists and other people involved. I hope to provide some insight into practices and strategies civic activists use as well as their reasons and motivations and whether or not they are successful in achieving their established goals. Therefore, the proposed research question in this study is as follows:

RQ: How are social media used by a civic engagement initiative in the context of the refugee crisis?

With this overarching research question in mind, the following sub-questions were developed for the purpose of assessing the multiplicity of factors that needs to be explored for answering the main research question:

1) *How are the different online platforms used? More specifically, what messages are circulated through the different online platforms and for what purpose?*

2) *Why are the different online platforms used in a certain way? More specifically, what reasons and motivations lie behind this specific use?*

Definition of Concepts

In this study, the social media will be understood as Internet applications that are based on the interactive Web 2.0 and allow their users to interact with each other by creating and sharing information. This definition includes social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter) as well as content-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube), for instance.

The term "online platforms" refers on the one hand to the diverse social media platforms that were outlined above, and on the other hand to other kinds of online presence such as an official website.

Civic engagement will be understood as "the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others" (Adler & Goggin, p. 236). In this study, civic engagement initiative will be the term used for grassroots initiative and be understood as online and offline communities of ordinary citizens that organize and mobilize for this common goal of improving conditions for others.

1.2 Research Methodology

This thesis aims to understand how social media are used within the context of a civic engagement initiative. The nature of the main research question requires to take into account multiple dimensions which reflect themselves in the two sub-questions.

While sub-question 1 serves to examine how the different online platforms are used, sub-question 2 aims to give the meaning making perspective to sub-question 1 by examining why the different online platforms are used in this particular way. Both sub-questions are relevant for answering the main research question as they complement each other in order to achieve a holistic picture of how social media are used by a civic engagement initiative. For instance, it is not enough to only investigate what messages are used on the different online platforms since the explanation behind what kinds of messages are used may lie in the specific reasons and motivations behind their use. For this reason, both dimensions of research are intertwined and thus relevant for answering the main research question.

Due to this requirement of taking a holistic approach to the research problem, case study methodology was chosen as a research strategy. On the example of the specific case of the German civic engagement initiative *Moabit helps* (for a detailed description of the case, see 1.3), this case study comprises of two major methods that were selected to answer the sub-questions and therefore the overall research question.

Firstly, qualitative content analysis of the initiative's social media presence and website was conducted, aiming to answer sub-question 1 by identifying communicative practices and strategies on the different online platforms. Secondly, in-depth interviews were conducted with both activists, volunteers and other people involved at the initiative in order to answer sub-question 2, aiming to capture their reasons, motivations, personal perceptions and challenges behind this particular use of the different online platforms.

1.3 The Case: *Moabit helps*

In order to understand how social media are used in the context of a civic engagement initiative, this study focuses on one particular case of civic activism through social media, the German initiative *Moabit hilft*[1], a refugee aid initiative based in Berlin.

In Berlin alone, approximately 90.000 refugees have arrived in the course of 2015 ("All down the line", 2015). Upon arrival, they must register in order receive health care and services. In the summer of 2015, the situation worsened dramatically and chaotic conditions prevailed outside Berlin's only registration center, the Regional Office for Health and Social Affairs, also known as LaGeSo[2]. With hundreds of asylum seekers coming to the capital per day at this point (Senat von Berlin, Senatsverwaltung für Gesundheit und Soziales, 2015), long waiting periods were the result and hundreds of refugees were sleeping on the streets and lining up to register, sometimes for days ("All down the line", 2015).

Stepping in under these conditions was *Moabit helps*, a local emergency relief initiative for refugees that is committed to alleviate the untenable conditions outside the registration center in the district of Berlin-Moabit. Since the beginning of August 2015, countless volunteers are continuously taking care of the refugees arriving at the LaGeSo. Amongst others, volunteers at *Moabit helps* provide water and food supplies, clothing, hygiene items, medical assistance, they arrange translators to incoming refugees who speak little or no German, and help them with permission documents to an accommodation place or with legal assistance.

Moabit helps is a group of local residents, institutions and associations which has been supporting asylum seekers coming to Berlin since 2013. When the situation outside the LaGeSo worsened dramatically in the summer of 2015, the initiative started a highly successful Facebook call and within a week built an infrastructure for medical and humanitarian care with the help of volunteers. The initiative's Facebook group, which had already been founded by one of the initiators in September 2013, quickly grew to thousands of members after the Facebook call. Due to this overwhelming response by the public, the

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[1] *Moabit hilft!* is German for "Moabit helps!". Moabit is the name of a district in Berlin. In this research paper, the English translation will be used.
[2] LaGeSo is a frequently used acronym for Regional Office for Health and Social Affairs (German: "Landratsamt für Gesundheit und Soziales") within German news coverage

initiative quickly set up Facebook and Twitter pages to further promote their cause and raise awareness for the refugees' situation.

Ever since then, the initiative lives of the can-do spirit of its numerous volunteers on social media. In order to create better living conditions for the refugees, *Moabit helps* has already created a variety of events to raise money and goods that are necessary to cover basic needs. Volunteers also offer free German lessons for the incoming refugees and provide daycare for children, for instance.

Although the initiative has sparked an exceptional volunteer movement on social media and received great support online and offline, it has also experienced the negative effects of having a great online presence. *Moabit helps* became famous across borders when a volunteer falsely reported in January 2016 that a 24-year-old Syrian had died as a consequence of the long waiting hours in front of the registration centre (Malm, 2016). As a result, the initiative faced a public outcry, hostilities on their social media pages, and even death threats, over months.

1.4 Social and Scientific Relevance of the Research

The case of *Moabit helps* was studied for three reasons. Firstly, *Moabit helps* was chosen as a subject for this study because of the high social relevance of the context it operates in. Today, refugee issues are present in global news on a daily basis, due to the overwhelming migration wave from Africa and the Middle East towards Europe. News reports of refugees losing their lives under tragic circumstances on the journey to Europe are making headlines on a frequent basis and are consequently discussed on many different levels (Bradley, 2014).

Within the German population, opinions are divided on how to deal with the challenge of hundreds of thousands of immigrants. The public discourse, especially on social media, is repeatedly leading to radical and even racist comments about these migrants. The uncontrollable large numbers of refugees arriving in Germany have put enormous pressures on its citizens and security services at all government levels. Furthermore, many people fear that Germany is not up to the challenge and will creak under its open door policy. Whereas anti-immigrant right-wing movements such as Pegida[3] demand the deportation of the

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[3] *Pegida*, the German acronym of "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident", is an anti-Islamisation political movement founded in October 2014 in Dresden

refugees, many citizens take part in initiatives in order to promote acceptance and integration of refugees. For instance, in September 2015, volunteers welcomed thousands of refugees at Munich central station with donations in the form of clothes, toys for children, or food (Connolly, 2015). The initiative *Moabit helps* is therefore particularly interesting to research because it operates in the context of this current polarizing topic of the refugee crisis in Europe.

Secondly, this case is interesting to research because its success relies almost exclusively on social media. On their Facebook and Twitter pages combined, the initiative has gained support from around 22.000 followers within the period of three years, with the majority of followers joining after the overwhelming influx in summer 2015. Their Facebook group alone counts more than 15.000 members who provide first aid in urgent matters. The Berlin-based project's growing success is predominately based on its followers' swarm intelligence on social media. Through different kinds of posts on their social media pages, *Moabit helps* is engaging with its followers and calling them to action in refugee matters. Moreover, as one of the civic engagement initiatives which quickly grew beyond its initial small-scale intentions and one of the biggest and most prominent refugee initiatives in Germany today, *Moabit helps* is an example of how social media can successfully be used by civic activists. Also, because of its social media history with both success (e.g. the mobilization of hundreds of volunteers for immediate emergency relief) as well as negative backlash (e.g. the hate comments following the false report about the death of a Syrian refugee), this case can provide insights into a multifaceted experience of social media use.

Finally, it is interesting to examine how civic activists use social media from an academic point of view. Here, this study will actively try to address three gaps which have been identified in literature. Firstly, most research that has been done within this specific area or in related fields has been conducted in the field using quantitative research methods (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Obar, Zube & Lampe, 2012) qualitative research on this topic, however, has been neglected so far. Since quantitative research has limitations on measuring in-depth real-life situations, it is interesting to investigate this subject from a qualitative research perspective. A qualitative approach allows for a rich and detailed picture of how civic activists use social media and can not only make observations but give account on motivations behind behaviour. Secondly, although quantitative research has provided valuable insights into the impact of social media use on

civic engagement and political participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Tang & Lee, 2013; Xenos, Vromen & Loader, 2014), only few studies have concentrated on the actual use of social media for civic engagement purposes and how this use looks like. While a number of studies have investigated advocacy organizations' use of social media (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009), the majority of those merely examine its commonness, meaning whether organizations make use of social media or not. The aspect of how and why social media are being used, is treated rather superficially though.

However, investigating this actual use of social media may provide an important contribution to the understanding of the notion of civic engagement in the context of social media activism as well as make a contribution to actual practices of use which may be useful for further research of how civic activist act and work in a digital environment. For these reasons, research is needed on how of social media platforms are being used by civic initiatives.

Lastly, when it comes to the combination of the refugee crisis and social media, the focus of the press (O'Malley, 2015; Wendle, 2016) and also of researchers (Harney, 2013; Wall, Campbell & Janbek, 2015) has predominately been on the way in which refugees use mobile phones and social media on their escape. Therefore, this study aims to turn the tables by investigating this social issue from the activists' perspective instead.

1.5 Outline

This study is divided into four chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review and critical analysis of previous research on the role of social media in civic engagement and highlight their importance in this context. This section consists of several subchapters which will address various aspects of social media and civic engagement. The first subchapter will give insight into research on the concept of engagement and democracy. The second subchapter will elaborate on civic engagement as political participation. In the third subchapter, civic engagement as social capital will be discussed. In the fourth subchapter, the role of social media for activism will be critically analyzed. Chapter 2 concludes with a literature review of prior studies on message-level analyses of how social media have been used by civic activists.

Chapter 3 introduces the case study methodology, which has been selected to investigate the subject, as well as the rationale for choosing this research strategy. The chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design in terms of data collection and analysis process, terms of units and time period. Information on the procedure of the case study is provided, including descriptions of how the data from the in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis of the social media pages was processed and analyzed. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the idea of triangulation that was applied in this study.

In chapter 4, the results derived from the performed research are presented. Here, the findings from the qualitative content analysis and the in-depth interviews are brought together within the frame of the case study. Therefore, the findings for the use of the Facebook page, the Facebook group, the Twitter page and the website will be presented in a detailed way before bringing the main findings together in a summary of results.

Finally, chapter 5 provides a conclusion in the form of an answer to the research question and theoretical implications of the findings. The thesis concludes with a critical reflection on the strengths and limitations of this study as well as provide specific recommendations for future research in terms of replicability and generalizability.

The interview guide as well as the codebook developed in the qualitative content analysis are attached in the appendix. The interview transcripts are digitally available as a complementary file, including a brief summary of each of the transcripts.

2. Theoretical Framework

Recent protests and activist movements such as Iran's Green Revolution, Occupy Wall Street or the Arab Spring appeared to be empowered in certain ways through the use of different social media platforms. The Internet, and particularly social media, is no longer just a tool that allows communication on a global scale, but also allows to organize activism. Today, the accessibility of the Internet provides a new potential of empowering individuals, implying that everybody with access can participate in today's digital landscape. The interactive features of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube appear to enable new forms of communication which again may encourage new forms of civic participation. Social media's potential in terms of raising awareness and calling to action has drawn attention to whether social media can play a role in engaging citizens and if the case, what this role specifically entails. Therefore, more and more civic engagement initiatives have started to explore the potential of social media as a tool for raising awareness for specific societal issues (e.g. related to human rights, health or the environment) and mobilizing others, with the goal of achieving a positive change within society.

The subject of this study, namely the civic engagement initiative *Moabit helps* that uses social media for the purpose of helping refugees in need, is one of those initiatives. This thesis aims to understand how social media are used by civic activists in the context of the refugee crisis while taking actual practices of social media use as well as the motivations behind this kind of use into account. Before going ahead with the explanation of how this research was performed, the case of *Moabit helps* needs to be situated in the context of civic engagement and social media. In order to understand how social media are used in the particular case under study, this chapter will therefore provide a literature review on civic activism as a form of civic engagement and the role that social media play for contemporary civic activism.

The chapter will begin with an explanation of why civic participation is a central element of any democracy and a critical reflection on its notion as such. The concept of civic engagement is described in order to give an overview of the different possibilities there are for citizens to participate in civic and political life and situate the case of *Moabit helps* into this particular context. Since *Moabit helps* is operating between the civic and the political sphere, the notion of civic engagement as political participation will be introduced more

specifically. After that, the concept of civic engagement as social capital will be introduced. This further serves to provide an understanding of how large networks of civic activists are constructed through relationship networks. Since this project is interested in the way in which communication and engagement practices intersect, the implications of social media for civic activism will be discussed next, including a critical discussion on social media's democratic potential. Finally, examples of how social media have been used in the context of advocacy in the form of a small literature review will serve as an outlook for this study.

2.1 Defining Civic Engagement

Participation on a civic or political level is a central and constitutive basic feature of any modern democracy. As Franklin (2002, p. 148) states, participation is "the lifeblood of democracy" and serves as an intermediary between the people and the political elite. In other words, democracy without participation is "like Hamlet without the Prince: it just does not work" (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2008, p. 468). Indeed, any democracy depends on the participation of its citizens for encouraging a healthy contribution of public opinion concerning policy issues to governing authorities. Also, a great part of the collective action that may be defined as political at the local level relies on ordinary citizens voluntary contributing time and resources (Klesner, 2007).

Cohen (1971) emphasizes the participatory nature of democracy: "Democracy is that system of community government in which, by and large, the members of a community participate, directly or indirectly, in the making of decisions which affect them all" (p. 7). The active participation of citizens in politics and civic life is therefore a central element of democracy. For instance, in a democracy, political participation includes voting in elections, becoming involved in organizations or even in protests. Participation is essential for citizens to have a say in politics.

A term that is frequently being used for participation is civic engagement. But what actually does civic engagement mean? Adler and Goggin (2005) state that the definition of the term is largely dependent on the context and the perspective and interests of the definer. The authors differentiate between several perspectives on civic engagement, for example as a community service, collective action or political involvement for social change, and, taken those different perspectives into account, define civic engagement as "how an active citizen

participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future" (p. 241). Furthermore, different dimensions of civic engagement respectively emphasize different aspects of the term. Here, Adler and Goggin (2005) make a distinction between the involvement in community activities such as donating blood and the participation in political activities such as supporting a political party.

In literature, there is no single agreed-upon definition of civic engagement. Many definitions limit civic engagement to voluntary community service or understand it as collective action, assuming that "such engagement most often comes in the form of collaboration or joint action to improve conditions in the civil sphere" (Ekman & Åmna, 2012, p. 285). Further definitions stress the political aspect of civic engagement and put it on one level with collective action which is explicitly political. For this reason, Ekman and Åmna (2012) develop a new typology to differentiate between the terms of civic engagement, political participation and their variations that are often used interchangeably. According to the authors, civic engagement refers to activities within the civil domain but outside of the political domain. Voluntary work would be a typical example of this understanding of civic engagement.

Carpentier (2011), understands the concept of participation as "a political process where the actors involved in decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to an extent) egalitarian" (p. 164). The author structurally differentiates between participation on the one side and access and interaction on the other side. Whereas access and interaction remain essential conditions for participation, they cannot be equalized with participation.

Civic engagement can be either a measure or an instrument of change, depending on the conditions and intention of efforts. It can refer to the numerous ways in which people participate in society, politics and civic life. As previously mentioned, the definition of civic engagement is largely dependent on the context (Adler & Goggin, 2005), which in this research project is the refugee crisis that makes the *Moabit helps* a case of humanitarian aid. The primary goal of the civic initiative is to help others in need, in this case the refugees arriving in Germany, and also to mobilize other people to follow their example. Humanitarian aid is a form of civic engagement in the sense that citizens get engaged within the community of *Moabit helps* in order to improve conditions for refugees (see Adler & Goggin, 2005). Moreover, with the goal of helping others in need, the activists and volunteers working at the

initiative take collective action. For those reasons, civic engagement in this research project will be primarily be understood as actions directed towards helping others in need.

It must be noted that, in the case of *Moabit helps*, the notion of civic engagement cannot be limited to the civil domain (see Ekman & Åmna, 2012) since the initiative is stepping in where politics failed to take action (e.g. to guarantee adequate living conditions for refugees). In fact, the initiative has a strong relation to the political domain by serving as an intermediary between the people, in this case the refugees, and the political elite (see Franklin, 2002).

For these reasons, two different approaches to civic engagement will be introduced in the following part. One approach is focused on the political aspect, the other one on the notion of civic engagement as social capital.

2.2 Civic Engagement as Political Participation

In research, there has been a strong focus on the political aspect of civic engagement, also known as political engagement or political participation. A frequently used definition of political participation has been made by Verba, Nie and Kim as "legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take" (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978, p. 1). The authors emphasize that although political activities are aimed against a government, they do not include forms of civic violence such as riots or assassinations, meaning that political participation in that sense is based on legal ways of influencing politics.

This political engagement can take on the form of a vote; however, voting is only one way of many in which citizens can participate because political participation is not limited to election times. Periods between elections are just as relevant for citizens to "influence government decisions in relation to specific problems that concern them" (Verba, Nie & Kim, p. 47). Therefore, political participation includes electoral as well as non-electoral behaviour.

Ekman and Amnå (2012) give examples of legal political activities in the form of protest behaviour such as demonstrations, strikes or boycotts. Also considered political participation is the membership in or activity within specific groups or parties such as the involvement in women's rights groups, the global justice movement or animal protection

movements, for instance. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that political engagement is initiated by ordinary citizens who are not involved in any professional political roles.

Verba and Nie (1972, p. 51-54) distinguish between four dimensions of political participation: (1) Citizen-initiated contacts, meaning contacting government official about a specific issue, (2) voting, (3) campaign activity, which can include membership in or work for political organizations or parties as well as donating money to those, and (4) cooperative activity, which focuses on issues in the local community.

According to Kitschelt and Rehm (2008), political participation takes place at three different sites: (1) in public places, (2) in communication with political decision makers, and (3) by involvement in the electoral process. At each site, citizens decide about the intensity of their involvement, for instance, whether they simply want to participate in collective events or get involved to a greater extent by becoming a mobilizer for those events. Besides these three sites of participation, the authors further distinguish between three modes of participation: (1) social movements, (2) interest groups, and political parties (3).

In this project, the initiative *Moabit helps* has a strong relation to the political domain by serving as an intermediary between the refugees and decision-making authorities. Within the initiative itself, several aspects of political participation unite. For instance, the initiative engages in communication with political decision makers (see Kitschelt & Rehm, 2008) and people within *Moabit helps* take on roles with different intensities of involvement such as the one of a volunteer or a spokesperson (see Kitschelt & Rehm, 2008). Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the initiators of *Moabit helps* are ordinary citizens who are not involved in professional political roles (see Ekman & Åmna, 2012). The civic activists further engage in various activities to promote their cause such as demonstrations, for instance (see Ekman & Åmna, 2012).

2.3 Civic Engagement as Social Capital

A different approach to civic engagement is via the notion of social capital. The overarching idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Just as physical capital and human capital are resources people can use to their advantage to achieve certain goals, social capital can enhance the productivity of individuals or groups (Putnam, 2002). While physical capital refers to physical objects (e.g. a screwdriver) and human capital refers to properties

of individuals (e.g. a college education), social capital refers to the value of social networks among people and the ways in which these networks improve coordination and collaboration for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1993).

Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2002) is perhaps the most well-known and influential contribution to the research on civic engagement as social capital. The author defines social capital as the "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2002, p. 19). In other words, social capital creates value for people who are connected because of mutual benefits that might emerge from the elements of trust, reciprocity, knowledge and collaboration linked to these relationships.

Social connections can help us in multiple ways - emotionally and socially as well as economically. For individuals, social capital facilitates access to the resources of social and community life from support, recognition and knowledge to job and training opportunities. For instance, this reflects itself in the way that friends might provide you with a helping hand, your family might give you emotional support or you might find a new job because of someone you know (Putnam, 2002).

However, not only the individual benefits from social capital, but the wider community is affected as well. Whereas individual social capital refers to benefits that directly result to individuals as members of a certain social network, collective social capital can be understood as benefits that occur indirectly due to that the individual lives in a society which is more civically aligned and that works better due to its high level of social capital (Portes, 2000). Putnam calls collective social capital a "public good" that often occurs as a by-product of other social activities (1993, para. 3). He illustrates his argument on the example that members of "Florentine choral societies participate because they like to sing, not because their participation strengthens the Tuscan social fabric. But it does" (para. 18).

Within the past decades, the concept of social capital has become increasingly popular in various social science disciplines and has amongst others been used to study various aspects of community life, democracy and government or collective action (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Community strengthening, group forming, citizen empowerment or partnership building all are essential constituents of social capital that are increasingly being recognized for their economic and political capacity to help expansive development goals.

According to Putnam, social capital has significant consequences on the political level. His theory can be understood as a "two-step model of how civic society directly promotes social capital, and how, in turn, social capital (the social networks and cultural norms that arise from civic society) is believed to facilitate political participation and good governance" (Norris, 2001, p. 3).

In order to understand how social capital theory relates to civic activism, it is necessary to put the concept of social capital in the context of collective action and social networks. For this reason, the following subchapters aim to explain why social capital plays an essential role as a producer of civic activism. The role of strong and weak ties for civic activism and social networks will be illustrated and the importance of trust and reciprocity for social capital will be clarified. The last subchapter will elaborate on the relevance of bonding and bridging social capital for social networks.

2.3.1 Strong Ties and Weak Ties

The functioning of social networks is dependent on the strength of social ties. According to Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll and Rosson (2005), the strength of a social tie is characterized by the combination of time, trust, reciprocity and emotional intensity that are spent on it. Granoveter (1973) makes a distinction between strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties are close relationships between friends or family members which are cared for and maintained on a regular and permanent basis. Weak ties, on the other hand, are non-intimate relationships that are maintained on an inconsistent and infrequent basis. Examples of weak ties include acquaintances, colleagues, and people only met once.

With regard to civic engagement, social ties are important as they enable collective action. Scholars widely agree that individuals taking part in civic activism organizations are commonly recruited through pre-existing strong and weak social ties (Marwell, Oliver & Prahl, 1988). Furthermore, when the people within an organization are connected by social ties, collective action is more likely to take place than when they are not connected.

In order to understand why and which features of social ties are particularly important for civic activism, the next subchapter on trust and reciprocity will provide insight into the elements of relationships which produce collective action, followed by a subchapter on bonding and bridging capital, illustrating the role of social ties within social networks.

2.3.2 Trust and Reciprocity

Putnam (2002) emphasizes the importance of trust and reciprocity within social networks and individuals. In his theory, those two core components are closely connected as producers of social capital.

Firstly, trust facilitates cooperation. Putnam states that the more people trust others and the more they have the impression that other people trust them in turn, the more likely is a cooperation among them. This trust emerges on the one side from norms of reciprocity and on the other side from networks of civic engagement (Putnam, 2002). The extent of trust can vary within communities. Whereas in some communities, trust only extends to strong ties such as friends or family, trust extends to weak ties such as total strangers in other communities. Sander & Lowney (2006) claim that in communities with larger social networks, it is more likely that people act in a trustworthy way, since the reputation of being untrustworthy travels fast in well-developed networks and acts of untrustworthiness happen at the expense of the whole community.

Although social capital is comprised of multiple norms of behaviour, reciprocity is regarded as the most relevant. It is based on the belief that good actions or prosocial behaviour will be returned at a later time. Putnam's theory of social capital claims that well developed cooperative networks facilitate the elemental circumstances for social trust, tolerance and cooperation, providing the social infrastructure for a dynamic democracy (Norris, 2011).

2.3.3 Bonding Capital and Bridging Capital

Putnam (2002) makes a distinction between two dimensions of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding capital consists of strong ties within groups and describes exclusive networks between socially homogeneous groups of people with similar sociodemographic and socioeconomic backgrounds and similar interests. Examples of bonding capital therefore include fraternities, country clubs or bowling clubs. On the other side, bridging capital consists of weak ties across groups and is referred to as inclusive networks between socially heterogeneous groups of people with different sociodemographic and socioeconomic backgrounds and diverse interests. Examples of bridging capital therefore include the civil rights movement, youth groups or religious organizations (Putnam, 2002).

Bonding capital occurs within a community of individuals such as a neighborhood (e.g. in this case study the district of Moabit in Berlin) (Larsen et al., 2014). It is crucial for the establishment and capacity development of communities which bank on shared concern and the power of membership to take collective action for common goals. According to Bandura (1997), people are more inclined to take collective action if next to a higher social status they have strong social ties. For this reason, strong social ties among members of a community contribute to the possibility of people moving beyond their respective self-interests towards collective action that benefits the wider community (Larsen et al., 2004).

As a next step, bonding capital is an essential antecedent for the establishment of bridging capital (Larsen et al., 2004). Whereas bonding capital creates true identity and trust within a group but not to outsiders, with bridging social capital, the trust from the primary group is transferred to society. Therefore, bridging capital can contribute to developing a more inclusive institutional network that has a stronger democratic character and that also has implications for wide-ranging development on the political and economic level. Bridging social capital allows sharing and exchanging information, ideas and innovation between manifold groups and thus, contributes to a general agreement among groups with diverse interests (Larsen et al., 2004).

Communities with high levels of social capital are expected to also have a higher quality of life compared to those with lower social capital (Putnam, 2002). Communities with higher social capital are also seen as more capable of efficiently coordinating and mobilizing collective action due to their high levels of social networks, trust and norms of reciprocity (Kavanaugh et al., 2005). Moreover, the most effective organization for collective action is achieved by communities which possess bonding social capital as well as bridging social capital (Granovetter, 1973). This is because individuals who are part of several groups, operate as bridging ties (Kavanaugh et al., 2005).

2.3.4 Social Capital and the Internet: Increase or Decrease of Civic Engagement?

In order to understand how the various elements of social capital are adopted in this research on how social media are used by civic engagement initiatives, the ideas behind social capital theory have to be set in the context of social media. With social media enabling connections in a digital environment, new perspectives of social capital need to be considered. The

question is how social media features and whether they can play a role in increasing or decreasing social capital.

Putnam (2002), on the one hand, declares that online interactions are incapable of promoting social capital for four reasons. First, face-to-face interactions have a higher extent of non-verbal communication and therefore bear greater contextuality than online interactions. Second, he argues that face-to-face interactions can connect people with diverse opinions and backgrounds, while online interactions happen among like-minded people (also see 2.4.1.1). Third, online interactions are incapable of fostering social capital since there is a digital divide in terms of Internet access, which only permits interactions by an elite group of people. Fourth, Putnam claims that the Internet bears more promise in terms of entertainment than for communication. However, Putnam's perspective is not surprising, considering that the times of Web 1.0 were defined by escapism, entertainment and anonymity (Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001).

On the other hand, previous research on the relationship between the Internet and social capital suggests that bridging social capital in particular may be enhanced by the Internet which, by enabling its users to develop and keep up large, spread out networks of connections which people could potentially utilize, promotes loose social ties (Donath & Boyd, 2004). Donath and Boyd (2004), for instance, assume that social media could play an important role in increasing weak ties since the technology is particularly useful for maintaining those relationships in a cheap and easy way.

While research has particularly focused on the relationship between bridging social capital and the Internet, findings are not as conclusive when considering bonding social capital. Because the debate around the social effects of digital technologies still implies that it makes people spend less time with strong ties and that is more suited for connecting with weak ties, studying bonding social capital is of special sociological interest (Neves, 2015). Neves (2015), for instance, found that there is a positive relationship between Internet use and bonding social capital. However, the study found no significant relationship between social media use and bonding social capital.

A recent study on the formation of bridging and bonding social capital on Twitter (Sajuria, Hudson, Dasandi & Theocharis, 2015) suggests that online interactions seem to unite like-minded people and build small, close groups among them. On the one hand, this indicates that digital communities may have the potential to support the building of trust and

reciprocity, on the basis intra-group ties. However, this may also cause homogeneous groups of like-minded people, that lead to group members not being exposed to more diverse content by excluding non-members.

Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe (2007), however, found a strong relationship between the use of Facebook and bonding as well as bridging social capital, with the stronger relationship being to bridging social capital, however. Even though Facebook may not automatically help to build the kind of close connections that are usually associated with bonding capital, their study suggests that the use of Facebook nevertheless is important for bonding social capital. One explanation the authors give is that it may assist people with maintaining already existing close relationships. This is also confirmed by Park, Kee & Valenzuela (2009), who further state that social media are able to reinforce already existing social ties and communities by regularly keeping users up to date about what is happening with their connections.

More recent work by Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela (2012) found that using social media as a news source is a significant predictor of a person's higher levels of social capital and increased online as well as offline civic and political participation. The authors further argue that increased exchange of information between online group members facilitates the building of trusting relationships among them and thus, further supports social media's potential to increase social capital. Through giving its users the feeling of being connected to a community as well as by enhancing their knowledge about other participants, social media can foster reciprocity and trust and, accordingly, create new perspectives for civic and political engagement (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012).

In this research project, the elements of social capital theory are important for understanding the case of *Moabit helps* which relies on a large digital network of civic activists and volunteers. Social ties are important as they enable collective action. In the case of a digitally organized civic engagement initiative such as *Moabit helps*, individuals taking part in civic activism organizations are recruited through pre-existing strong and weak social ties. While the political definition of civic engagement provided information about which kind of actions fall under the term of civic engagement or political participation, social capital theory aims to explain how those networks come to be constructed and which elements play an essential role for the success of a network of civic activists.

2.4 Civic Activism and Social Media

Within the past decade, social media platforms have grown rapidly in popularity and user figures. As of 31 March 2016, Facebook climbed to 1.65 billion monthly active users (Facebook, Inc., n. d.) while Twitter reported 310 million monthly active users (Twitter, Inc., n. d.), for instance. This rise of social media platforms has changed how social movements are organized and transformed activism within the past decades. By making the mobilization of large numbers of supporters to a diversity of causes easier and such activity turning into an everyday phenomenon, new forms of activism are emerging.

Access to the Internet has encouraged the growth of large digital networks of activists, on the technological as well as on the economic level (Dahlgren, 2009). The user-friendliness and adaptability of use allow those with less social influence to engage as citizens in political life as well. Through the use of digital technologies citizens can more easily express their opinions and thus counter the views of the more powerful (Dahlgren, 2009).

61 percent of millennials today believe that social media are the new power of young people, 70 percent even think of it as a "force for change" (Havas Worldwide, 2011, p. 20). Indeed, the vast majority of millennials perceive people who have gained influence through social media as a greater power of change than politics. Today, social media play an increasingly important role in contemporary activism, with research on the Arab Spring revolutions as well as the Occupy movement showing that hundreds of thousands and sometimes even millions of people can be reached and mobilized through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube (Poell & van Dijk, 2015). Having observed the influential role that social media platforms have played in these movements and also in other events, millennials understand the capacity of social media as a tool for civic action, organization and social change (Havas Worldwide, 2011).

However, while this shows that young people perceive social media to be an effective tool for activist purposes, it does not shed light on whether social media indeed are an influential tool in civic activism. For this reason, this chapter will discuss the meaning of social media for civic activism and aim to give a detailed examination of its implications for civic engagement practices. It includes a critical discussion on the debate around social media's democratic potential, carefully weighing arguments in favour of and against. The chapter ends with an outlook for this study in the form of a brief literature review on how social media are

being used to communicate by exploring different frameworks that are applied for analysing communicative practices on social media.

2.4.1 The Civic Potential of Social Media

Amongst others, social media have been defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Social media create new ways of communication on the basis of the interactive features of Web 2.0, where users could not only view and work with the information available on the Internet, which was also possible on Web 1.0, but also participate in the online environment by communicating and exchanging opinions and ideas (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2010).

A key factor of social media is participation. It appears to be the essential element that clarifies the difference between old web and the new interactive web, even though basic interaction tools were available in the beginnings of the Internet (e.g. chats or forums) (Effing, van Hillegersberg & Huibers, 2011). Today, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter) as well as content-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube) enable online participation on a global scale.

As the participatory character of social media lowers the barriers of interaction by enabling its users to easily and cheaply develop and maintain large, spread out networks of weak ties (Donath & Boyd, 2004), new opportunities have emerged for civic engagement. Since the ability of social media to reach new audiences may increase the visibility of current societal issues such as public health, political uprisings or climate change, social media may turn into an effective tool for engaging large numbers of individuals in those issues (Hwang & Kim, 2015). In a next step, the interactive social media landscape turns social media platforms into tools for mobilizing users to take part in collective action (Hwang & Kim, 2015).

Overall, social networking sites can help to overcome two major problems that offline civic action encounters (Poell & van Dijk, 2015). Firstly, since online communication enables transmitting information, social media can help with informing and connecting large groups of physically disconnected people on an issue of shared interest. Social media not only make it easier to keep in touch with strong ties (e.g. friends and family) but also with weak ties (e.g. acquaintances) (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007) and they also make new connections

possible. Secondly, social media can help such groups with overcoming the different problems associated with collective action. For instance, virtual communities such as Facebook groups may facilitate new ways to jump-start civic engagement due to their ability of lowering the cost of collective action (Pasek, 2009).

Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, already predicted this social use of the Internet from the start: "The Web is more a social creation than a technical one. I designed it for a social effect—to help people work together—and not as a technical toy" (Berners-Lee & Fischetti, 1999, p. 133).

Recent years have seen an increasing debate regarding the political role of the Internet and social media and whether these digital technologies only facilitate access to information or promote political participation as well. The Internet's potential to enhance civic engagement has been examined in numerous studies (Effing, van Hillegersberg & Huibers, 2011; Xenos & Moy, 2007). While it has been argued that the democratic potential of social media lies in their ability to support civil society and the formation of a public sphere in which exchange of a diversity of opinions and information takes place (Shirky, 2011), the recentness of those digital technologies and the rarity of relevant events also make it difficult to generally attribute democratic potential to social media. Scholars have divided opinions on the Internet's contribution to democracy. Visions of democracy are often set against dystopian visions such as, in an extreme case, the "Big Brother" scenario of total transparency. These opposite perceptions will be exemplified and contrasted in the following two subchapters on arguments for and against social media's civic potential.

2.4.1.1 Social Media as a Negative Influence on Democracy

In a world of smartphones, selfie sticks and the massive competition for "Likes" and "Shares", many people are skeptical of social media's civic potential and critics question the promise of social media activism. The overall argument is that, although the Internet and social media make it easy to reach large numbers of people, the ultimate engagement of users remains debatable. Amongst others, sceptics argue that social media as such only promote superficial relationships and take the users' attention away from public issues (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012).

For instance, Bakardjieva (2009) claims that for the vast majority of the population, only small-scale political, often individual decisions and actions can be found which remain

subjective and submerged in everyday life, far from "the hot arena of politics" (p. 103). For these motions of personal positioning, the Internet has turned out to be a true blessing, their consequences, however, have neither been remarkable nor radical. The author further states that proper bridges between this so-called "subactivism" and actual political affairs are missing.

Mostly, the democratic potential of the Internet, and especially of social networking sites, has frequently been criticized for its questionable potential for enhancing sustainable social change. Critics argue that social and political activities on the Internet are often unsuccessful in achieving real-world social change (Conroy, Feezell & Guerrero, 2012).

Gladwell (2010), for instance, argues that real social change can only be achieved through high-risk activism such as the 1960 Greensboro sit-ins by Afro-American college students. According to the author, a successful activist movement involves high-risk activism and is formed by strong social ties, and social media in his opinion, merely promotes weak social ties and low-risk activism. Accordingly, the danger of using social media for promoting social change is that users might interpret simple online actions as enough to promote change. As a result, effective real-world activism is replaced with ineffective online activism.

Along with this skeptical perspective, the term *slacktivism* emerged to challenge the the effectiveness of online civic activism (Christensen, 2011), often considering it inferior compared to real-world activism (Lim, 2013). Slacktivism is usually used in a derogatory sense to define civic or political activities that take place online (Breuer & Farooq, 2012). It accuses these activities of having little to no practical effect other than to make the individual people feel content that they have shown support for an issue or contributed to a cause. In this context, online civic or political activities are consequently seen as a "narcissist act of self-presentation" (Breuer & Farooq, 2012, p. 4). Examples of slacktivism include signing an online petition, retweeting a shocking image or quick content-sharing by clicking a "Like" button on a social networking site such as Facebook.

Slacktivism is particularly common with movements that tend to oversimplify complex issues to a hashtag. The use of Twitter's hashtags for online activism is also referred to as "hashtag activism" (Dewey, 2014). Although the increasing of awareness through the use of a hashtag can mean power, the connection between awareness and action is often missing and results in slacktivism. Prominent examples of campaigns accused of slacktivism amongst others include the #Kony2012 campaign, which aimed to draw attention to arresting Ugandan

war criminal Joseph Kony (Meikle, 2014), as well as #BringBackOurGirls, a social media campaign over the abduction of roughly 250 schoolgirls in Nigeria in 2014 (Dewey, 2014).

On another note, scholars argue that while the Internet may facilitate access to information for individuals to diverse opinions and mind-sets, instead of furthering democratic and open-minded world-views, it encourages polarization and makes Internet users more narrow-minded (Del Vicario et al., 2016). This is mainly because the content on the Internet and social media may be polarized to a high extent due to the mechanism of homophily, which is "the tendency of similar individuals to form ties with each other" (Colleoni, Rozza & Arvidsson, 2014, p. 318).

Homophily is frequently explained by cognitive dissonance and selective exposure theories that state that people have positive feelings when confronted with content that supports their opinions in contrast to feeling under pressure to adapt when confronted with contrary world-views. For this reason, people tend to limit their exposure to information that stands in contrast to their own beliefs and instead expose themselves to information that reinforces their opinions (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). The result are homogeneous networks. "Homophily limits people's social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001, p. 415).

In the context of discussion about the democratic potential of the Internet, this phenomenon has led to a new debate on whether the Internet facilitates the creation of so-called "echo chambers" (Colleoni, Rozza & Arvidsson, 2014) in which Internet users only get exposed to viewpoints by like-minded individuals which reinforce established perspectives and opinions they already agree on. Scholars argue that the danger of homophily lies in online contents that lack attitude- or opinion challenging content and therefore only promote homogeneous communities and networks (Del Vicario et al., 2016).

In addition, in today's digital environment, exposure to information is increasingly mediated by the increasing personalization of the online experience. As a result, so-called "filter bubbles" are created, in which content is filtered by algorithms that are based on a user's previous online experience and behaviors (Bakshy, Messing & Adamic, 2015). For instance, online platforms such as Facebook or Google show their users new content based on content they have previously viewed or liked.

2.4.1.2 Social Media as a Positive Influence on Democracy

However, not all scholars share this sceptical view. Instead, they believe that the Internet is furthering democracy as a "tool for social change" (Lim, 2013, p. 636). For instance, Shirky states that "political freedom has to be accompanied by a civil society literate enough and densely connected enough to discuss the issues presented to the public" (Shirky, 2011, para. 22). In his article, he gives examples of a number of incidents in which the Internet played a decisive role in bringing social change, such as its function in virally spreading an exposé by *The Boston Globe* on sexual abuse within the Catholic Church which led to numerous lawsuits against the church around the globe. Shirky further supports Katz & Lazarsfeld's theory that the formation of political opinions does not directly occur through the mass media but instead is a two-step process. According to this theory, the first step is the transmission of opinions by the media. In a second step, those opinions get echoed by someone's social connections. Shirky argues that political opinions are formed in this second social step: The second step is the step "in which the Internet in general, and social media in particular, can make a difference" (para. 22). Just like print media, the Internet not only spreads information but produces information as well and thus enables people to voice their opinions and discuss diverse conflicting views on a private as well as on a public level (Shirky, 2011). In this regard, social media have transformed how political opinions are formed and, by making information easily accessible, contributed to more people being able to form thought-out opinions.

With regard to civic activism, Bennett and Segerberg (2012), argue that digital media have caused a paradigm shift from collective action to web-based "connective action". The authors consider connective action driven by digital communications where "sharing" is the formative element as a personalized content distribution across social networks. Moreover, in the case of civic digitally networked action, networks possess divergent political capacities, depending on the digital networks indefinite number of pathways for individual networks to converge.

Loader, Vromen and Xenos (2014) examined the potential of social networking sites for influencing the political positioning and civic engagement of networked young people. The authors perceive the relationship between social media and civic engagement as strong and positive. Due to the interactive and collaborative character of social networking sites as well as their capacities for user-generated content, new ways of political communication emerge.

The scholars assign social networking sites an actual role in the process of the youth becoming politically engaged. However, they note that the impact of this engagement and participation within participatory cultures of social media remains unclear.

Even though the Internet appears to possess promising features for enhancing civic engagement, online civic engagement activities have their limitations. For instance, several studies in the early 2000s found evidence of limited social network expansion (Wellman et al., 2001; Katz & Rice, 2002). Thus, the Internet is no longer being regarded as a universal solution to every problem. A more recent study found several participation barriers to youth civic engagement in social media such as language and content, information, slow feedback, disbelief, privacy and social identity or too much commitment and workload (Brandtzæg, Haugstveit, Lüders & Følstad, 2015).

Whereas the influence of general Internet use on political effectiveness and trust remains debatable up to this point, many researchers nevertheless are confident about the capability of political Internet use to increase traditional forms of political and civic engagement through social capital (Norris, 2001; Xenos & Moy, 2007). Kavanaugh et al. (2005) argue that individuals with bridging ties improve their ability to inform community members and organize for collective action through using the Internet. According to the authors, people with bridging ties have higher levels of "community involvement, civic interest and collective efficacy" (p. 119) than people who do not have bridging ties across groups. Furthermore, people with bridging social ties who extensively use the Internet also use it more frequently for social purposes than people without bridging social ties. Thus, they are also more socially engaged offline. Kavanaugh et al. (2005) suggest that the Internet may be an effective tool for individuals with bridging social capital to maintain relationships, exchange information and increase offline interaction.

Many researchers also consider Internet use a promising tool for building central elements of social capital such as interpersonal trust and political knowledge, especially among young people (Pasek, 2009; Loader et al., 2014). Since the Internet is especially popular among this age group, many of them use the Internet to get information about political issues, which provides hope for a counter development to the trend of youth civic disengagement.

2.4.2   The Use of Social Media in Civic Activism

Although posts and tweets are the primary dynamic element of any social media platform, those messages published by civic engagement initiatives have yet to be fully examined. Accordingly, little is known about communicative practices of civic initiatives on social media. This subchapter serves as a small literature review of social media use in related fields such as communication by non-profits or advocacy groups as an outlook for this study. It will focus on the communicative practices that have been observed and identified across different online platforms as a result of message-level analyses.

With regard to message-level analysis of social media platforms, scholars have developed applicable frameworks for understanding non-profit communication on social media within recent years. For instance, the most relevant framework for message-level analysis is provided in recent work by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) on how non-profit organizations use Twitter suggests to classify tweets with regard to three key communicative functions: information, community and action. According to the authors, posts with information as the main function have the purpose of "spreading information about the organization, its activities, or anything of potential interest to followers" (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 341). Post with the main function being community focus on how the organization "can foster relationships, create networks, and build communities on [social media] through [posts] that promote interactivity and dialogue" (p. 342). Finally, the primary purpose of posts that fall under type of action is "getting followers to 'do something' for the organization, whether it is to donate […], attend an event, join a movement, or launch a protest" (p. 342).

The categories created by Lovejoy and Saxton were also applied by Guo & Saxton (2013) who investigated the social media use of 188 civil rights and advocacy organizations for advocacy purposes. By combining deductive and inductive approaches to content analysis, the authors examined several dimensions of social media usage. By using the categories of information, action and community, the authors examined the dimension of message types within non-profit organizations' social media communication. Moreover, offline advocacy practices that had been identified in literature were transferred to the online advocacy practices. The authors further used inductive analysis to identify new emerging communicative practices of social media-based advocacy.

Auger (2013) also applied the categories of information, action and community in her research on non-profit advocacy organizations' use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The author saw the necessity to adapt the different communicative functions to her study and thus sub-coded the functions of action and of community. With this in mind, action included subcategories such as "donation appeal", "promoting an organizational event" or "call for volunteers and employees" (p. 374). Community included subcategories such as "acknowledgement of current and local events" or "giving thanks and recognition" (p. 374).

Since the *information-action-community* scheme has repeatedly provided valuable insights into how non-profits and advocacy organizations make use of social media and appears to be a principal approach to message level analysis, it will be adapted to the context of civic engagement for this research (see 3.2.2.5).

3. Methodology

This study aims to understand how social media are used by a civic engagement initiative in the context of the refugee crisis. Under this main research question, two complementary sub-questions examine (1) how different online platforms are used, aiming to identify what kind of messages are circulated through the different online platforms and for what purpose, and (2) why the different online platforms are used in this specific way, aiming to identify what reasons and motivations lie behind this specific way of use.

In order to understand this question of social media use, the research problem must not only be examined from one angle, but rather from a variety of angles. This is because the main research question cannot be answered by only investigating one dimension of a multidimensional research problem. To be more specific, it is not enough to only investigate what messages are used on the different online platforms since the explanation behind what kinds of messages are used may lie in the specific reasons, motivations and visions behind their use. In turn, when only focusing on the specific reasons and motivations behind the use of different social media platforms, the question remains how these motivations translate to actual practices of use. The nature of the research therefore requires taking a more holistic approach that is able to capture the different facets of social media use in the context of the main research question.

The central idea behind taking a holistic approach is that the significance of any dimension can only be understood by relating it to other dimensions because the significance of one dimension only is not transparent on its own (Given, 2008). Taking a holistic approach, however, allows to gain a comprehensive and complete picture of the research problem (Stake, 1995) as, in this case, both dimensions of social media use contribute to understanding the main research question. For the aspects mentioned above, this study will therefore look at social media use in a more holistic way, which is what recommends a case study.

This chapter provides a detailed description of this research strategy. It discusses the methodology that has been applied with regard to its limitations and advantages as well as the reasons for the choice of method. Moreover, detailed information is given on the methods that were selected under this case study methodology in terms of sample, data collection, operationalization, research instrument and data analysis.

3.1 Case Study Methodology

A case study approach is a common way of conducting social science research. According to Yin (2009), case studies are used in order to gain knowledge about individual, group, organizational, social or political phenomena. He further defines a case study as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). A case study is therefore intended to analyse the complex nature of a single object of study by providing a high level of detail and understanding. It usually consists of a combination of different research methods with the purpose of examining one specific case from different angles.

3.1.1   Defining a Case

Stake (1995) defines a case as

> "a special something to be studied, a student, a classroom, a committee, a program, perhaps, but not a problem, a relationship, or a theme. The case to be studied probably has problems and relationships, and the report of the case is likely to have a theme, but the case is an entity. The case, in some ways, has a unique life. It is a something that we do not sufficiently understand and want to - therefore, we do a case study (p. 133)."

A case usually is a single object of study that is both unique in many ways and similar to others cases in many ways. A case is usually chosen because it is interesting to study for both its uniqueness and specificity as well as its commonality (Stake, 1995).

In this study, the particular case to be investigated is the German civic engagement initiative *Moabit helps* and its use of social media. Since preliminary research on social media practices in civic activism is limited, this case was chosen to identify communicative practices in social media activism. *Moabit helps* is a particularly suitable candidate to approach from a case study research perspective because on the one hand, it is unique because of its specific successful use of social media that makes it stand out among initiatives operating in the same field. The initiative is also unique in their particular extreme social media experience, as in contrast to other initiatives, they dealt with enormous positive feedback as well as immense

negative backlash. On the other hand, in the context of commonality, the initiative is one of hundreds of social media initiatives that were founded during the refugee crisis in Germany, that are all working towards the same goal, that is helping refugees in need.

Yin (2009) further argues that a case study approach has a distinct advantage when *how* and *why* questions are to be the focus of the study, a contemporary set of events is to be examined over which the investigator has limited or no control, the contextual situations are relevant for investigating the specific phenomenon, and the phenomenon and the context are not clearly distinguishable. For those reasons, *Moabit helps* is particular suitable for investigating from a case study approach. While the main research question is *how* social media are used by a civic engagement initiative in the context of the refugee crisis, *how* and *why* questions are also found in the sub-questions. The contemporary phenomenon in this study is the civic engagement initiative, while the context that is relevant for examining *Moabit helps* is the refugee crisis in Germany.

By analysing the complex nature of their communicative practices on social media and the reasons behind this specific use, especially aspects which apply to a broader context may be beneficial for other initiatives in the same or in related fields (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Moreover, assessing this specific single case can give insights into how social media are used in the context of a contemporary civic engagement initiative that is operating through a digital network of activists and volunteers.

3.1.2   Limitations and Advantages of Case Study Research

When conducting case study research, is important to understand and acknowledge the limitations and advantages of this research approach.

Case studies have been subject to a number of criticism, mainly for their lack of methodological rigor and a researcher's tendency to have a biased interpretation of the collected data. Since it is usually one investigator collecting the data, this could potentially lead to a bias in data collection and influence in the direction of findings and conclusions. In case studies, this influence of bias on results is considered significantly greater than in other research designs (Yin, 2009). Further disadvantages of case studies concern their external validity and generalizability. Since only a single case or just a few cases are usually being examined, it has been argued that the results of case study research cannot necessarily be

generalized to the wider population and do not add to scientific development (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Although case studies have received criticism for their inability to generalize their results, they are widely recognized in a variety of social science disciplines, especially when detailed explanations of social behaviour are required (Zainal, 2007). It has been argued that the value of a single example is generally underestimated as much can be learned from examining a particular case, especially those aspects which apply to a broader context (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 2005). According to Erickson (1986), since the general lies in the particular, learnings from a single case can be transferred to similar situations. From this perspective, it is the reader, not the researcher, who decides what can apply to their specific context.

The primary advantage of case studies lies in their ability to provide a holistic account of a phenomenon, the ability to take into account a multiplicity of factors, and the amount of detail which is collected compared to what is available through other methods. The collected data is usually a lot richer and of greater depth and also helps to clarify complex real-life situations which may not be acquired through other methodological approaches (Zainal, 2007). As May (2011, p. 226) notes, "the goal for many proponents of case studies [...] is to overcome dichotomies between generalizing and particularizing, quantitative and qualitative, deductive and inductive techniques."

In the case of *Moabit helps*, some aspects of the case may be generalized and some are specific to the case. For instance, their negative experience with social media is particular to the case since the false report of the dead refugee was directly only associated with this particular initiative in the press. Besides that, while the context of the refugee crisis limits the generalizability of the case in the sense that civic engagement initiatives operating in other fields might make use of social media in a different way, the wider findings may apply to other initiatives that are active in the same field or in similar fields. However, as Erickson argued, learnings from a single case can be transferred to similar situations, and since the way in which *Moabit helps* uses social media can be considered as successful in a certain way, other initiatives might be able to learn from their experiences.

With regard to the limitations of case studies, this research further addressed the issue of validity of the results through the idea of methodological triangulation (see 3.2.1). Triangulation has been considered a process of using multiple perceptions in order to clarify

meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 2005). In this study, this process of triangulation contributes to the validity of the research itself with two methods investigating the same phenomenon.

3.1.3   Methods Used in Case Studies

Case studies are usually performed by the researcher collecting data about a particular case through a combination of various research methods. The chosen methods can either be qualitative (e.g. interviews, qualitative content analysis), quantitative (e.g. surveys, experiment) or a combination of both. In case study research, the goal of the research determines the methodological choices.

In the case of this study, the nature of the research problem suggested to take a qualitative research approach. This is because qualitative research is suitable for assessing the meanings, motives, patterns and understandings of the subject under study as well as to provide an in-depth and detailed description which is the aim of this study (Patton, 2002). Moreover, since the field of social media use in the context of civic activism is rather underexplored in research, the exploratory nature of this study suggested taking a qualitative research approach as well.

In order to investigate sub-question 1, how the different online platforms are used, a qualitative content analysis was found as an appropriate method (see 3.2.2). This is because content analysis can help to find out what kind of messages are used on the different online platforms by identifying significant patterns within the data through the process of coding and thereby enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2002).

Sub-question 2, why the different online platforms are used in a certain way, was approached through in-depth interviews (3.2.3). This is because they are able to provide detailed information about the civic activists' personal experience such as perceptions, feelings, attitudes or behavior (Patton, 2002).

3.2 Methods

This section gives a detailed overview of the methodological choices made and the procedures used to answer the research question. Firstly, the rationale for selecting

methodological triangulation is explained. After that, the single methods are discussed and justified in detail regarding the choice of method, unit of analysis, sampling techniques, operationalization and data analysis.

3.2.1   Methodological Triangulation

In order to find out how social media is used by civic engagement initiative, the research was approached from several different angles. In the social sciences, this research process is also referred to as *triangulation* (Thurmond, 2001). The term triangulation originates from navigation, describing the procedure that requires executing three measurements to calculate the exact position of a single point on a grid (Patton, 2002). In social science research, the term is used in a less literal sense and describes the use of two or more methods to strengthen the research design in order to increase the ability to make sense of the results (Thurmond, 2001). Triangulation is generally seen as a combination of methodologies in order to investigate the same subject and produce more richness or a more balanced picture of the data.

Although the researcher is collecting information from multiple perspectives, the research is always aimed at corroborating the same fact or phenomenon (Yin, 2009). In case study data collection, in particular, the opportunity to use many sources of evidence is considered a major strength (Yin, 2009, p. 114). The use of multiple sources of evidence allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues and enables a thorough investigation of the research problem from more than one angle (Yin, 2009).

Thurmond (2001) distinguished between four types of triangulation: the combination of "either two or more (1) data sources, (2) investigators, (3) methodological approaches, (4) theoretical perspectives or (5) analytical methods within the same study" (Thurmond, 2001, p. 253). The type of triangulation chosen depends on the purpose of a study. In order to find out how social media is used by a civic engagement initiative, methodological triangulation, which involves the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or program (Patton, 2002), was applied. According to Denzin (1978), methodological triangulation can help overcome partial perspectives and offer a holistic account of the studied object.

Following a within-method triangulation, two different qualitative data-collection procedures were therefore applied in this study: in-depth interviews and qualitative content

analysis. Given the purpose of this case study, these particular qualitative methods were selected to be the most suitable to answer the proposed research question, since they allow for a holistic, comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the phenomenon to be studied (Patton, 2002). More specifically, the combination of the two methods allows for an analysis of the civic activists' intentions, their understandings, views and norms behind their use of social media (in-depth interviews), as well as for an analysis of the actual practices of use in the content developed and circulated on their social media pages (qualitative content analysis) (for a detailed justification see Chapter 3.3.3.1 and Chapter 3.3.4.1).

Triangulation is one approach for researchers to ensure and establish validity in a study by investigating a research question from a variety of angles. In methodological triangulation, it is assumed that validity has been established if the findings collected with different methods reach consensus and come to the same or similar conclusions (Silverman, 2011). Patton (2002), however, argues that the goal of triangulation is not to reach consistency across methodological approaches but rather to check for such consistencies. Since inconsistencies may likely occur due to the relative strengths of the various methods, he suggests to consider potential inconsistencies an opportunity for discovering deeper meaning in the data instead of considering them a weakness. The benefits of this perspective on triangulation include "increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem" (Thurmond, 2001, p. 254).

Figure 1 Triangulation / Sequential Research Design
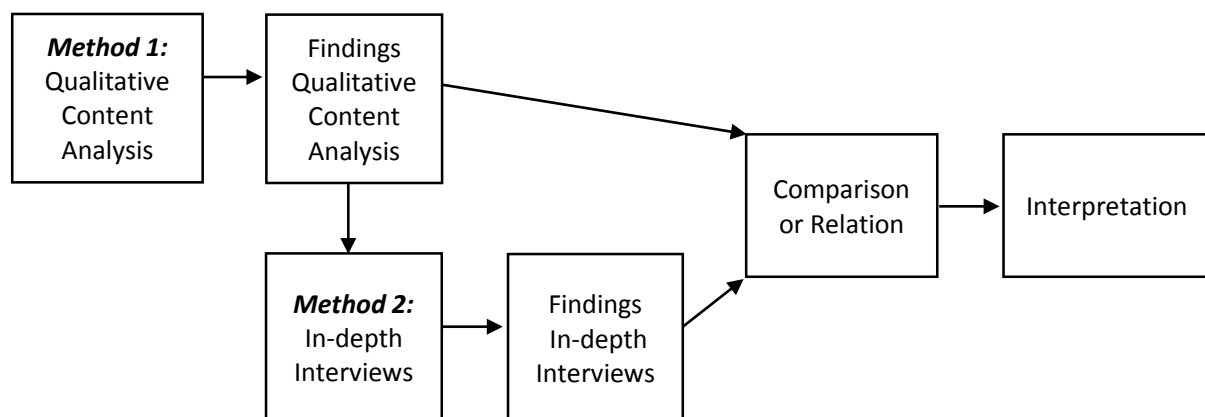
The research was carried out in a sequential timing. In other words, this means that the collecting and analysis of one dataset takes place after the collection and analysis of the other dataset (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this study, the data of the website and the social media platforms was collected through the first method of qualitative content analysis. The discovered patterns and themes found in the content analysis were then partly used for the development of the interview guide of the second method, in-depth interviews (see *Figure 1*). The following part will give detailed information on the methods of qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews and demonstrate why these methods were selected to answer the research question.

3.2.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

This study aims to investigate how social media is used by a civic engagement initiative in the context of the refugee crisis. This research question is answered with the help of two different methods. First, a qualitative content analysis of the social media pages as well as of the website of the initiative *Moabit* helps was conducted. This content analysis aims to answer the sub-question 1, "*How are the different online platforms used? More specifically, what messages are circulated through the different online platforms and for what purpose?*"

This section gives a detailed explanation and justification on why qualitative content analysis was chosen to investigate this particular research question and elaborate on unit of analysis, sampling procedure, operationalization and data analysis.

3.2.2.1 Choice of Method

Qualitative content analysis was chosen as the first method to approach the research question in order to understand how the different platforms are being used to communicate. The method is suitable since it allows for an in-depth understanding of the civic activists' actual observable communicative practices and strategies on their social media platforms as well as on their website.

Qualitative content analysis is a research method of systematically analyzing and interpreting written, verbal or visual data in detail (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The goal is to identify significant patterns within the data through the process of coding and thereby enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2002). The

focus generally lies on the typical features of language as communication while considering its contextual meaning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It goes beyond solely counting words in order to analyzing the language comprehensively with the intention of organizing text into categories that suggest similar meanings. Whereas the data to be analyzed is usually text-based, it can also contain non-text-based elements such as photographs, videos or layouts (Mason, 1996). In this study, the aim of the content analysis is to identify the communicative practices within the particular online platforms and to obtain a concise and extensive description, with the outcome being categories describing the social media use.

Qualitative content analysis in this research project not only aims to answer the research question by identifying themes and patterns within the text and visuals used across the different online platforms, but by considering the social context in which these communicative practices occur. In this study, this means not only to identify the type of message put forth on each of the platforms, but also to identify themes across the diverse posts by placing the case in the context of the refugee crisis while recognizing both its social media domain as well as its philanthropic character.

Qualitative content analysis may be used in an inductive or deductive way, or in a combination of both approaches (Cho & Lee, 2014), the choice of approach depending on the purpose of the study (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The main difference between the two approaches lies in the way that the initial codes and categories are formed. Whereas in the inductive approach, codes and categories directly emerge from the data, in the deductive approach, they directly derive from pre-existent theory or literature (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The reliability of qualitative content analysis can be increased through the ability of analysing and breaking down the data by creating categories which reflect the subject matter in a reliable way (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Moreover, in order to increase reliability of the method, it is essential to show the linkage between the results and the data. For content analysis, this is done by an in-depth description of the context, selection and characteristics of the respondents, data collection and data analysis process in order to make the links between data and results clear (2008).

3.2.2.2 Unit of Analysis

The qualitative content analysis was conducted for all online platforms on which *Moabit helps* is present to allow for a complete picture of their online strategy. This includes three different online platforms, namely their official Facebook page and a closed Facebook group, an official Twitter account and their website. Although the website does not explicitly fall under the category "social media", interactive features give it a social aspect and its analysis serves to relate its function to the other platforms and situate it in the initiative's overall communicative practices. Thus, the unit of analysis in this research contains the Facebook posts and tweets on social media and the different sections on the website.

3.2.2.3 Sampling

The first stage of the qualitative content analysis consisted in gathering all the social media posts published by the initiative over a period of 6 months. In order to be as recent as possible, 9 October 2015 until 9 April 2016 was chosen as the timeframe of analysis. Since the Facebook page of *Moabit helps* was established on the 12th September 2015 and the Twitter page was set up on the 9th October 2015, this choice allowed for an analysis of both social media platforms for the same time period of six months. Choosing this same time frame was important for detecting congruent posts across the social media platforms. As a result, 276 Facebook posts as well as 152 Tweets emerged.

For the initiative's Facebook group, which had been established in September 2013 already, the same time period was initially chosen to allow congruence across platforms. However, due to the high average number of 15 posts per day, eventually, a random sample of 200 posts had to be chosen from this time frame.

The website was assessed as a whole by saving the ten different sections of content such as the front page, news or a section on information about the initiative (see *Figure 2*). The version of the website from the 9th of April 2016 was downloaded and saved. This way, all platforms were investigated at the same point in time and all provided an equivalent level of information.

Figure 2 Screenshot of the front page of the website of *Moabit helps*

3.2.2.4 Data Collection

As a first step, the posts from the public social media platforms were extracted from the respective Twitter and Facebook pages of *Moabit helps* using NCapture, a web browser extension which allows to capture website content for data analysis purposes. The data was then imported into NVivo 11, a software for conducting qualitative content analysis. In contrast to the Facebook page, the Facebook group as closed group prevented retrieving the posts by means of software and analysing them in NVivo. Therefore, the posts were saved as files and later analysed by hand. The data collection from website occurred through saving the different sections as files.

3.2.2.5 Operationalization and Data Analysis

In order to understand research question 1a), how different online platforms are used by the civic activists, and 1b) what types of messages are circulated through the different online platforms and for what purpose, a coding scheme was developed, which is a set of

measurements brought together in a codebook (see Appendix A). Overall, the research aimed for a combination of deductive and inductive approaches to analyzing the different online platforms which will be clarified in the following part.

Function

Prior research on civic initiatives' use of social media is limited, however, relevant research in the field of advocacy and non-profit communication (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012) informed me that social media is used by non-governmental advocacy groups for three main functions, that is to circulate information about their cause, to build communities around their cause and to call for action on their cause (see 2.4.2).

The coding scheme in this research project was therefore inspired by the *information-community-action* scheme developed by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012). It was chosen as a deductive approach to the data because it can provide message-level analysis. More so, the coding scheme not only looks at what types of messages can be identified but focuses on identifying their purpose of use as well.

Accordingly, posts with information as the main function have the purpose of "spreading information about the organization, its activities, or anything of potential interest to followers" (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 341). In the case of *Moabit helps*, informational posts include current developments in Berlin's refugee policies, current information on the initiatives' work at the LaGeSo or updates on recent news on the refugee crisis. Post with the main function being community focus on how the organization "can foster relationships, create networks, and build communities on [social media] through [posts] that promote interactivity and dialogue" (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 342). In the case of *Moabit helps*, this includes recognizing the work of other initiatives, thanking their followers for their efforts or engaging in dialogue with them. Finally, the primary purpose of posts that fall under the function of action is "getting followers to 'do something' for the organization, whether it is to donate […], attend an event, join a movement, or launch a protest" (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 342). On the different online platforms of *Moabit helps*, posts such as encouraging followers to donate goods and money or to participate in demonstrations were coded as action.

However, since the *information-action-community* coding scheme was developed for analyzing how non-profit organizations use Twitter, adaptions were made to fit this research

in the sense of relating it to the context of civic activism and to adjust it to social media beyond Twitter. Just as Auger (2013) adapted the same coding scheme by Lovejoy and Saxton to her own research by sub-coding the different functions of information, action and community, different sub-codes were created for this study.

Inspired by Auger (2013), the different purposes of information, action and community were thus sub-coded in order to allow for a more precise picture of what types of messages are circulated through the different online platforms and for what purpose. The sub-codes were adapted from Auger (2013) to fit the subject under study. As a result, "information" included 2 sub-codes, "action" included 6 sub-codes and "community" included 3 sub-codes (see *Figure 3*). Every Facebook post or tweet was first assigned with a single code according to its main function. In cases where where posts or tweets seemed to hold several functions, the code that was considered to be the main function was assigned. Additionally, it was assigned with a sub-code.

Figure 3 Coding Tree "Function"
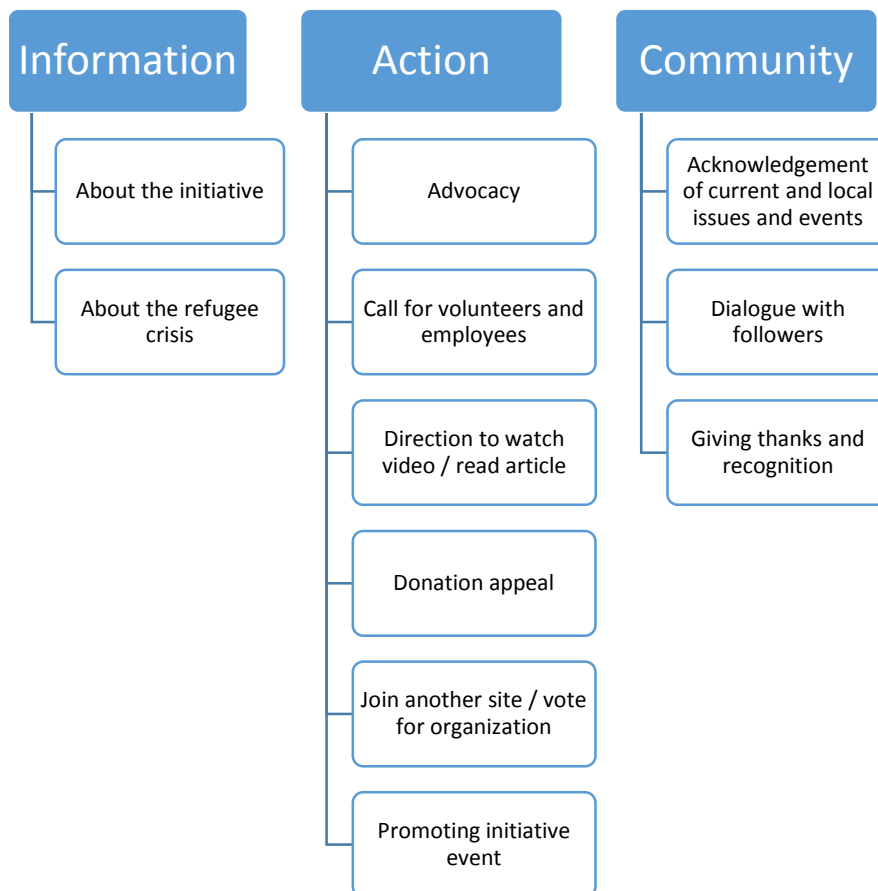
Format

However, during the coding process, I realized that other elements of the different posts appeared to be relevant. Since Facebook posts as well as tweets offer the possibility to post a combination of diverse contents such as text, photos or links, it is not sufficient to merely analyse communicative practices with regard to the main purpose of the message. Instead, different dimensions of analysis are needed. Herring (2009), for example, suggests to consider different components within web content analysis such as image analysis, exchange analysis or link analysis.

With regard to the research question of how different online platforms are used by the civic activists, coding for the format of the message adds the dimension to the research of how the features of social media are made use of. The format of the message looks into how those different elements that are incorporated within the interactive character of social media are used in the context of civic activism. The analysis of the format of the messages is important as it determines which features of social media are used more or less often and in which way. For the reason of adding this dimension to my research, I therefore decided to take an inductive approach in coding for the format of the message.

The first focus in this coding process was on identifying which elements of the posts are important for describing the communicative practices on social media. As a result, four categories appeared to be important when coding for format: (1) topic, (2) use of visuals, (3) use of links and (4) the metrics of engagement (see *Figure 4*). Those categories, on the one hand allow to compare different observations that were found across the different online platforms, and on the other hand, to compare and relate the findings to the results of the in-depth interviews (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

I noticed that the categories "topic", "use of visuals" and "use of links" were closely related to the thematic context of the refugee crisis, which suggested taking an inductive approach to the coding, in this case the use of a grounded theory approach, which is an approach to data where theory is "derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). The categorization of the data was hereby conducted through the processes of open, axial and selective coding as described by Boeije (2010). As a result, each of the identified categories includes codes that emerged from these coding processes.

The context of the refugee crisis matters in the way that it influences the three categories mentioned above in their respective coding. For instance, codes within the category "topic" are specific to the issue of the refugee crisis (e.g. inhumane conditions, which may not occur in other fields of civic activism such as environmental activism). While the categories may be applied to social media use in the wider context of civic activism, specific codes within the categories are closely related to the specific context. This is already evident in the main research question that situating how social media are used by civic activists within the context of the refugee crisis.

The category "topic" relates to the main topic of the single post. Codes within this category include the political response, inhumane conditions, pro-refugee activism and refugee stories. For instance, posts were coded as political response when the main topic was administrational failure, anti-refugee behavior, right-wing activism or governmental responses. Moreover, posts were coded as inhumane conditions when they primarily addressed health issues, unacceptable living conditions or the waiting lines at the LaGeSo.

The content analysis in this study also meant analyzing the use of visuals such as photo or video material that was posted on the various platforms. Here, in contrast to using visual analysis that takes into consideration various elements such as camera angles, this research focused on the main theme that images as well as videos display. The category "visuals" therefore the codes of demonstrations, donations, experience reports, graphics, individual refugees, leaflets, the *Moabit helps* community, refugee accommodation, refugee camps, refugee projects and the waiting lines at the LaGeSo.

The category "links" on social media is important to investigate since linking to external content emphasizes the social character of social media. In this analysis, links will be understood as features such as tagging, sharing, and the use of hashtags. Here, the destination of the link is taken into account, meaning if the link leads to content within the organization's own online environment, to content produced by similar initiatives or organizations, the media, political actors or private individuals.

Finally, I realized that the metrics provided by the social media platforms may act as proxies for engagement. As discussed in the literature review on whether social media can play a role in engaging its users (see 2.4.1.1 and 2.4.1.2), this category "metrics of engagement" serves to analyze general engagement through Facebook metrics. This was done by means of the overall engagement rate measured by the amount of likes, shares,

comments on Facebook and the retweets and favorites on Twitter. This procedure allowed for a general evaluation of the communicative practices and strategies. In addition, the comments were analyzed by looking at whether they sparked mostly positive, negative or mixed reactions. Making this connection is necessary for understanding and evaluating the activists' communicative practices on social media since the engagement rate shows the impact of different types of messages. It helps to get a clearer picture of what works and what does not work for the initiative.

Figure 4 Coding Tree "Format"
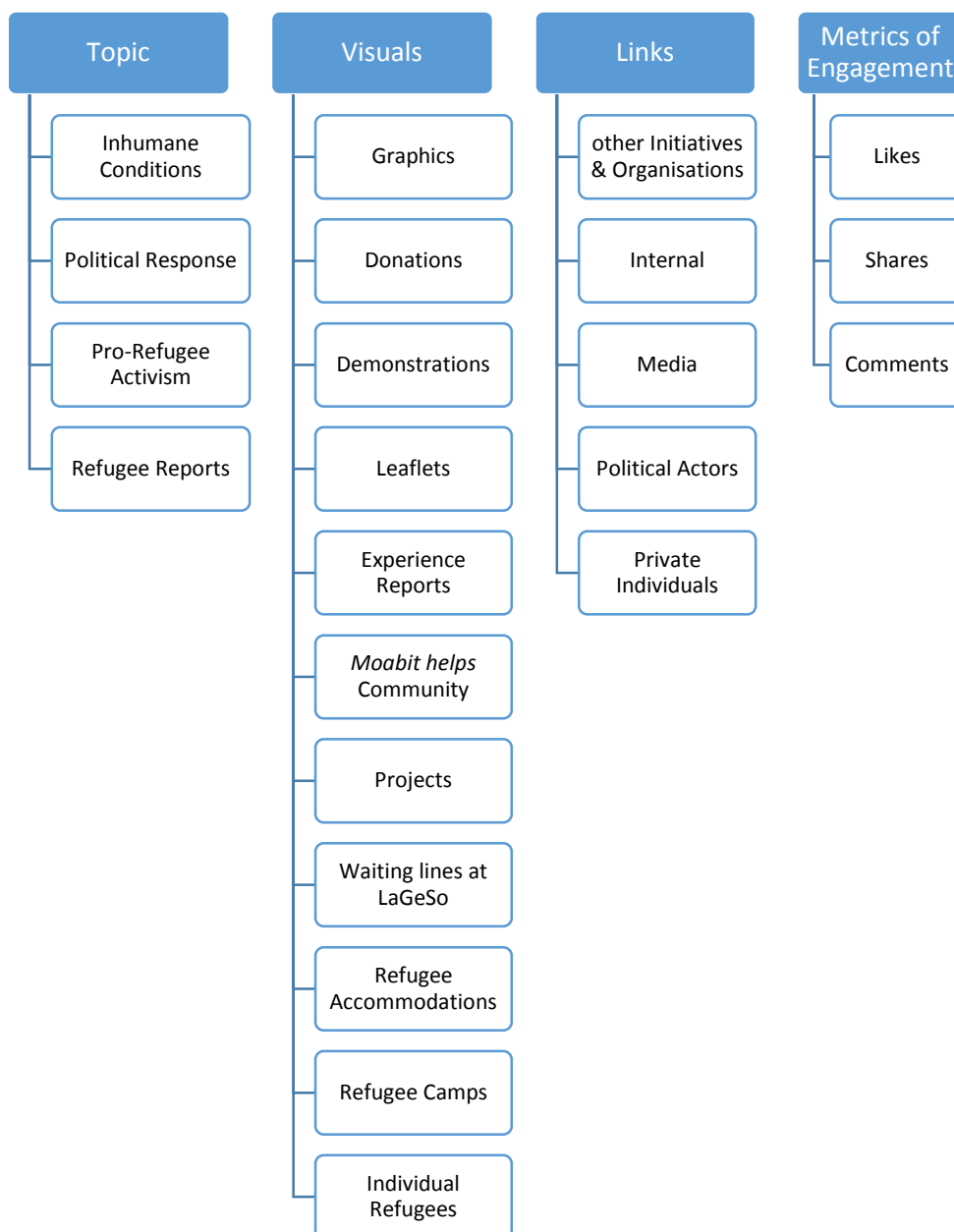
To sum up, the Facebook posts and tweets were first analyzed with regard to their purpose by assigning the codes of information, action or community. Moreover, sub-codes were assigned to allow for a better description of the various kinds of those codes. As a second step, the posts were analyzed by looking at the topic, the use of visuals, links and the metrics of engagement. With this adapted coding scheme, all posts could be assigned to clear categories.

For the posts retrieved from the Facebook Group, the same coding scheme was applied. However, the main difference here was that the content that was analysed was not only published by the account of the initiative but by a diverse number of group members.

For the purpose of analysing the website, the coding scheme developed for the social media platforms was used as well. Here, the entries within the different sections were coded for function as well as for format. However, due to the static nature of the website, certain changes were needed in the coding scheme. For instance, since the amount of content on the website is rather limited, some categories identified in the analysis of the social media platforms, could not be found on the website. While some sections also had multiple entries similar to a blog, other sections only contained a couple of paragraphs of information.

3.2.3   In-depth Interviews

This study aims to investigate how social media are used in the context of a civic engagement initiative. As previously mentioned, this research question was investigated from multiple perspectives. As a second approach, in-depth interviews were chosen to answer the research question. This section gives a detailed explanation and justification on why in-depth interviews were chosen to investigate this particular research question and elaborate on sampling procedure, operationalization and, finally, data analysis.

3.2.3.1 Choice of Method

In-depth interviews were selected to answer sub-question 2, "*Why are the different online platforms used in a certain way? More specifically, what reasons and motivations lie behind this specific use?*" This method was chosen to approach this research question since it is able to provide detailed information about the civic activists' personal experience such as perceptions, feelings, attitudes or behavior.

According to Patton (2002), interviewing begins where observation ends. He argues that it is difficult to observe behaviors that took place in the past or generally not possible to observe feelings, thoughts or intentions. Whereas the qualitative content analysis served as an unobtrusive method by collecting observable data, the in-depth interviews complement the research by providing the meaning making perspective.

Interviews "start with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 2002, p. 339). Qualitative in-depth interviews are well suited to fuller understanding a phenomenon, especially when the goal is to obtain coherence, depth and density in the data (Weiss, 1995). Also, in-depth interviews are particularly useful for understanding the interviewee's experience, knowledge, and worldviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

The strength of in-depth interviews is that they can uncover the origins, causes and motivations behind specific observable behavior (Patton, 2002), which are important aspects when studying communicative practices. The respondents' detailed account on their knowledge, experiences, perspectives, understandings and interactions as well as the way they interpret those is relevant in uncovering potential underlying meaning behind their behaviors and communicative practices (Mason, 1996).

In order to allow the respondents to give detailed answers about aspects of their communicative practices which they considered important, semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected as the type of interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher asks the respondents a number of pre-formulated but open-ended questions (Given, 2008). This gives the researcher the opportunity to use probes which can help to allow new ideas to be introduced during the interview and obtain more in-depth information based on the answers of the respondents (May, 2011). Semi-structured interviews therefore offer an effective way of more freedom for both interviewer and interviewees (May, 2011).

3.2.3.2 Sampling

The sample in this study consisted of eight respondents, three initiators and five volunteers of the German civic engagement initiative *Moabit helps*. Given the nature of the case, the initiators are public figures and gave consent to use their names, however, they asked to disclose the identity of the volunteers taking part in this research. For reasons of coherence,

the initiators are therefore referred to as I1 through to I3 and the volunteers as V1 through to V5 in the results and conclusion chapters. Nevertheless, in order to provide some basic demographic information to the respondents, *Table 1* provides some basic anonymous information regarding gender, age and level of education of the respondents.

Since the purpose of this study is to investigate a single case, the respondents were selected through purposeful sampling and consist of individuals working for *Moabit helps*. Purposeful sampling is widely used to strategically and purposefully identify and select information-rich cases when resources are limited (Patton, 2002).

Table 1 Overview Interviewees

	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Responsibility	Education
1	Initiator 1	Female	38	Facebook Page	Diploma History
2	Initiator 2	Female	36	Twitter Page	Diploma Economics
3	Initiator 3	Male	32	Coordination Donations	Social Worker
4	Volunteer 1	Male	24	E-Mail	MA Student Informatics
5	Volunteer 2	Female	34	Coordination Events	High School Diploma
6	Volunteer 3	Male	24	Moderator Facebook Group	BA Student Architecture
7	Volunteer 4	Female	23	Moderator Facebook Group	BA Student Psychology
8	Volunteer 5	Female	26	Moderator Facebook Group	MA Student Engineering

To elaborate on the selection criteria within the community of people working for *Moabit helps,* individuals were chosen within *Moabit helps* that assumed particular roles within the initiative that were related to different types of knowledge about social media use and therefore held particular knowledge or experience related to the phenomenon of interest. For instance, the initiators were selected because of their in-depth knowledge about the initial development of the social media pages or about how social media came to be used. The initiators can further give detailed account on their experience of how the different platforms worked with regard to the initiative's goals. On the other hand, volunteers were chosen that had been active for *Moabit helps* for a period of several months and held positions with a certain responsibility within the initiative. In addition, two volunteers had a background as immigrants themselves and could therefore bring new interesting aspects to

the motivations of becoming engaged. Scholars argue that an adequate sample size has been achieved in in-depth interviews when the same or similar themes and topics emerge from different respondents (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

As a result of the sampling procedure, the final sample contained a mix of initiators (3) and volunteers (5), as well as male (3) and female (5).

3.2.3.3 Operationalization

For the in-depth interviews, an interview guide (see Appendix B) was constructed beforehand that was closely related to concepts introduced in the literature review as well as to the research question. Interview guides are generally more flexible compared to interview schedules and consist of a list of themes and questions the researcher can adjust to different interviewees (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). An interview guide may have a preferred order of questions, however, it is not fixed. The researcher is rather free to adjust the order of questions by dropping or adding some optional questions in order to attempt to find the best fit for the respective interviewee (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). The interview guide that was developed mostly contained open-ended questions, while the order of the questions followed from broader to rather specific questions, for the reason of establishing rapport in the beginning of the interviews.

In the interview guide, two overarching themes were discussed: In order to understand how social media are used by the civic engagement initiative, firstly, (1) the activists and volunteers' personal background and experience in terms of activism and social media usage was investigated, and secondly, (2) the initiative's social media use was examined. Each of the two themes included multiple sub-themes which aimed to address different aspects of the overall subject. The themes and sub-themes of the interview guide will be illustrated in more detail in the following part.

In the beginning of the interview, the interviewees were asked about the origins of the initiative or how they came to be involved with it in the first place. These first open questions had the purpose of being introductory and easy to answer and were meant to put the interviewees at ease since they could simply tell the story of how they came to be engaged (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

The first theme, the interviewee's personal background, was assessed through (1a) the interviewee's interest in the issue, (1b) previous experience with activism, as well as (1c) previous experience with social media.

The first sub-theme (1a) covered the interviewees' interest in the issue of the refugee crisis. The interviewees were asked to provide reason why they believe the issue is important to engage with and how the issue is personally meaningful to them. The second sub-theme (1b) dealt with the interviewees' previous experience with activism. This included their background or involvement around the refugee crisis as well as their previous experience with civic mobilization. The third sub-theme (1c) examined the interviewees' previous experience with social media. This included questions on their social media usage before their engagement at the initiative as well as questions on the purpose of this usage.

The second theme, social media usage, was covered by (2a) the initiative's present social media usage, (2b) the initiative's social media strategy, (2c) collaborations facilitated through social media, and, finally, (2d) offline mobilization through social media.

The first sub-theme (2a) served to investigate the initiative's online activities and how they are using social media for different aspects of their work. More specifically, the role and function of their Facebook and Twitter pages as well as the role of their Facebook group and their website was examined. Additionally, the interviewees were asked which other types of communication are relevant for the initiative (e.g. face-to-face communication or communication via e-mail). Furthermore, the interviewees' opinion on why they believe social media is an appropriate tool to address this issue was requested. The second sub-theme (2b) dealt with the initiative's social media strategy. This served to find out whether there is an actual strategy in place and how that strategy looks like. The interviewees were asked whether they use social media to strategically attract broader attention to the initiative and the refugee issue, in which way and which steps are taken for that purpose. This also included sharing how effective their strategy is and giving examples. Additionally, the interviewees were asked to provide examples of social media hindering the initiative's goals. The third sub-theme (2c) covered collaborations with other social media users. This included collaborations with other initiatives or groups as well as cooperation with journalists and the media. The purpose was to find out whether social media play any part in facilitating those collaborations. The forth sub-theme (2d) examined the connection between social media and offline mobilization. This covered questions on the initiative's involvement in offline collective action

and the effectiveness of this participation. Moreover, this included the role that social media plays in organizing offline collective action. Finally, the interviewees were asked which social networking site they find to be the best tool for offline collective action and for what reason.

3.2.3.4 Data Collection

The data collection took place in the time period between the 21st April and the 11th May 2016. The initiators had been contacted previously via e-mail, the volunteers were contacted via the initiative's Facebook group after already having been informed about my research project by the initiators. The in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face at the initiative's office in Berlin (5 out of 8) or via Skype (3 out of 8). Overall, the eight interviews that were conducted had an average length of 50 minutes with the longest interview lasting 57 minutes and the shortest interview lasting 41 minutes.

During the interviews, no problems were encountered. The semi-structured interview in combination with the interview guide allowed for adjusting the interview questions to the individual interviewee. This, for instance, meant that some probes came up in one interview but not in another and some issues were discussed more in-depth in some interviews but not in others. Nevertheless, in each interview, the important questions with regard to the research question were asked in order to generalize findings at a later stage of the research.

The face-to-face as well as the Skype interviews were audio-recorded in order to make the transcription process easier. Recording the interviews also allowed for an exact rendition of the respondents' answers. The use of audio-recording further enabled the researcher to better concentrate on the respondent's answer while taking notes of interesting aspects that came up during the interview. With regard to technical difficulties, no problems occurred.

In the beginning of each of the interviews, the researcher obtained the informed consent by having the respondents sign a consent form. This consent form included the agreement to being recorded and informed about the interviews being exclusively used for academic purposes.

All interviews were held in German as the researcher and the respondents all were native speakers. Conducting the interviews in the mother tongue of the respondents contributed to receiving answers with slightly differing gradations. After the eight interviews

were conducted, they were fully transcribed and resulted in 65 pages of interview transcripts. For the purpose of this study, the main findings were translated into English.

Through this process of audio-recording the interviews as well as transcribing them personally instead of outsourcing this process (2011), this study increased the reliability of the interviews. Moreover, the reliability of interviews can be increased through inter-rater reliability checks on the coding of answers to questions that are open-ended (Silverman, 2011).

3.2.3.5 Data Analysis

This research regards the in-depth interviews as a source of information on the case under study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). The in-depth interviews function as a "pipeline for transmitting knowledge" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) and complement the findings from the qualitative content analysis and are analysed through the actions of collecting, reading and interpreting in consideration of contextual evidence (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). The purpose of the interviews as factual interviews is to use the information provided in the interviews to understand the case under study rather than examining how the respondents make sense of their own use of social media.

The interviews were transcribed and read in order to capture information about how the different online platforms are used by looking for patterns as well as differences in what participants had to say about the use of Facebook, the use of Twitter and about the use of the website. In order to understand what the participants had to say about the use of social media, particular attention was paid to the experience of the respondents, their motivations, visions, and reasons for using social media in this specific way.

For the data analysis process, the answers of the respondents were then grouped together by platform with the goal of identifying patterns and divergences among the respondents.

3.3 Summary of Methodology

In this study on how social media are used by a civic engagement initiative, case study methodology was chosen as a suitable approach to the research problem since its nature required a multifaceted and holistic analysis. In order to investigate how social media are

used by a civic engagement initiative, an analysis of what messages are used on the different online platforms is not sufficient for answering the research question since the explanation behind which kinds of messages are used may lie in the specific reasons, motivations and visions behind their use.

Therefore, at first, a content analysis was conducted to examine sub-question 1, what messages are circulated through the different online platforms and for what purpose. For this analysis, posts and tweets were extracted from a time period of six months from the initiative's Facebook page, Facebook group, Twitter page and official website. The collected posts were then approached by applying the *information-action-community* scheme by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012). Then, the focus was on identifying patterns within the format of the posts. In this sense, it was coded for topic, visuals, links and engagement.

Secondly, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with activists and volunteers at *Moabit helps* to examine sub-question 2, why the different online platforms are used in this particular way by identifying reasons and motivations behind it. An interview guide was developed beforehand with the interviews being conducted between the 21st of April and the 11th of May 2016, at the initiative's office in Berlin and via Skype.

Approaching the main research question from those two methodological perspectives allowed for a holistic account of how social media are used by a contemporary civic engagement initiative as both dimensions, the actual use as well as the motivations behind it, are relevant for answering the research question. Moreover, through this methodological triangulation, the validity within this study is increased. Besides that, reliability is assured by making the research process transparent through explaining the methodology and data analysis methods in an adequately detailed way (Silverman, 2011), which is precisely what this chapter aimed for.

4. Results

This chapter presents the results of the conducted research on how social media are used by a civic engagement initiative in the context of the refugee crisis.

The content analysis was conducted to examine how each online platform was used by *Moabit helps*. Hereby, particular attention was paid on identifying what messages are circulated through the respective platform and for what purpose. First of all, this was assessed through identifying the key functions of information, action and community within the posts. Secondly, the focus was on identifying patterns within the format of the posts.

The interviews were conducted to examine why each online platform of *Moabit helps* was used in this particular way. Hereby, particular attention was paid on identifying reasons and motivations behind this specific use. Finally, this method looked for correspondences with the findings from the content analysis as well as new perspectives on the use of social media.

The results presented in this chapter are structured according to the different online platforms used by *Moabit helps* and therefore divided into subchapters regarding the use of the Facebook page, Facebook group, Twitter page and website of the initiative. Each of the subchapters hereby combines the findings that emerged from the content analysis and in-depth interviews used in this research in order to answer the research question. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of results.

4.1 Facebook Page

The official Facebook page of *Moabit helps* was founded on the 12th of September 2015. Since it was set up, it has gained the support of over 5700 followers and published over 300 posts. As a profile picture, this Facebook page uses the initiative's logo which is an abstract map of Berlin-Moabit with a star at the position of the LaGeSo. This image fits well with the context of the LaGeSo being the central place to go for refugees that arrive in Berlin. The chosen header picture is a painting of a globe with colourful handprints around it and drawings of people standing all around the globe. Next to the handprints, the names of their respective

owners are written. Above the globe, it says "Danke Haus R[4]". This painting was given to the *Moabit helps* by refugees in return for the initiative's help and shows how people from diverse backgrounds come together in a community. Below the name of the page, the Facebook page category "community page" is shown. The page further contains a map of where the initiative is to be found, a "Donate Now" button, the opportunity to send them a direct message, and sections on photos, videos, events, notes and reviews.

4.1.1 The Facebook Page as a Channel of Information

Function

The content analysis showed that while all primary functions are being used frequently, the function of "information" stands out in comparison to the other two. With a share of 39 percent, information is slightly ahead of "action" and "community" (32 and 29 percent, respectively). Those informational posts on the one hand include information about current activities of the initiative, for instance updates about certain projects or press releases:

> *With three representatives, Moabit helps participated at the Congress Welcome2Stay from Friday until Sunday. Roughly 800 activists from movements of welcome, solidarity, migration and anti-racism as well as refugees met for panels, workshops, networking and empowerment.*

On the other hand, those informational posts discuss developments of the refugee crisis, including recent changes in German refugee policies and politics as well as updates on the current situation of refugees in Greek refugee camps:

> *The asylum package 2 was adopted. CDU[5] + SPD[6], shame on you! The right to family reunification has now been suspended for refugees with subsidiary protection.*

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[4] English translation: "Thank you, House R." The LaGeSo is divided into several houses next to each other of which House R functions as the headquarters of *Moabit helps*
[5] CDU is the German acronym for Christian Democratic Union of Germany
[6] SPD is the German acronym for Social Democratic Party of Germany

This use of the Facebook page is interesting as it suggests the initiative's use of the Facebook page is primarily aimed at informing its followers and keeping them up to date. I have previously stated that Moabit helps has a strong relation to the political domain by serving as an intermediary between the people and the political elite (Franklin, 2002). The findings about the use of the Facebook page for informational purposes add another dimension to the role of the initiative. Not only does the initiative act as a negotiator between refugees and political decision-making authorities, but also as an intermediary between citizens and the political elite. By constantly keeping its followers updated about recent developments in refugee politics, *Moabit helps* assumes the role of an alternative and reliable source of information and steps in where news outlets may not reach this kind of depth due to covering a variety of topics.

In terms of "action" posts, six categories had been identified previously (see Appendix A). Out of those six, "donations" was with a share of 56 percent by far the most used one on the Facebook page. Numerous posts call their supporters to action in donating in the form of basic items such as clothes, hygiene products as well as money:

> *Dear community, we urgently need two strollers! Here is a new father, he has been coming here for two weeks already while the mother was still pregnant and now he has been asking for two days. Would be nice, if somebody would answer to this!*

Posts with the function of "community" were underrepresented on the Facebook page of *Moabit helps* with the initiative appearing to only make use of this platform once in a while to thank its supporters and acknowledging current events:

> *Wow, […] this is an amazing campaign. Thank you for this fantastic idea and the support.*

With only a handful of posts, the category of "dialogue with followers" is hereby almost not present. The only form of two-way communication that takes place on the Facebook page is when *Moabit helps* calls to action on donations. This suggests that the interaction with followers on the Facebook page is limited to call-to-action posts only. While followers still discuss under the respective posts, it is rare that the initiative joins the discussion.

Format

Topic-wise, the Facebook posts contain the four identified categories from most prominent to least prominent: Political response, inhumane conditions, refugee reports and pro-refugee activism. This is closely linked to the informational character of the Facebook page and shows how the initiative understands itself as a mediator of information, an alternative source of information on refugee politics that covers anything happening around this issue. *Moabit helps* does this by primarily focusing on political actions or non-actions and highlighting the inhumane conditions that mostly are a direct outcome of administrational and governmental failure:

> *In 2015, Syrians were granted asylum to almost 96% of refugee protection - for good reason. Meanwhile, this practice seems to tip: The BAMF[7] increasingly adjudges Syrian asylum only subsidiary status. For those concerned, this has fatal consequences.*

Through frequently addressing governmental and administrational failure, the impossibility of the distinction between the civic and political dimension of civic engagement becomes clear once more. In my opinion, this differentiation is particularly difficult to make in this case because of the civic engagement initiative's operation in a field that is related to current political issues.

In terms of links on the Facebook page, the vast majority of them leads to outside content in the form of newspaper articles published by German as well as international media. This supports the informational character of the majority of the posts. In addition, external content by other initiatives or organizations was often shared as were internal links that mostly led to Facebook events hosted by *Moabit helps*.

Visuals included images as well as video material. Here, images of refugee camps and refugee accommodations appeared to be the most dominant visuals. Secondly, photos and videos focused on the daily life at LaGeSo, for instance in the form of a short video portraying daily tasks at the headquarters of Moabit helps, images of the donations they receive or the long waiting lines in front of the registration centre. The amateurish quality of the visuals is

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[7] BAMF is the German acronym for Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

interesting to observe, as it suggests authenticity. All visual content except links to external contents appears to be taken from the perspective of an observer that is directly at the scene of events. This authenticity that results from this amateurish characteristics of the visuals may play a role in contributing to the image of Moabit helps as a trustworthy source of information and to making their work transparent in the public eye.

With regard to engagement, informative posts by far received the highest engagement rates on the Facebook page. This, however, is mostly due to the released statements on the false report on the death of the refugee which turned into heated discussions in the comments.

4.1.2 The Public Character as a Blessing and a Curse

In the in-depth interviews, findings from the content analysis were confirmed. For instance, Initiator 2 stated that the Facebook page mainly is a platform for information, which has been validated in the content analysis with the primary function of posts being classified as informational. She argues that "since most people are on Facebook, it is good for reaching a broad spectre of people" (p.3 Initiator 2). The target group of the Facebook group includes people who do not like to be in Facebook groups but still want to get informed. As a result, the Facebook page is held more general and more tightened as it cannot be closed. Also, much content is not published there since its public character makes it a good target for hateful comments from right-wing extremists. With regard to the function of information, Initiator 3 explains that journalists use the Facebook page as a source of information as well. Press releases are often also posted on Facebook and journalists reuse the content of posts as content on the Facebook page because they trust that if *Moabit helps* documents a certain topic, it is not to be taken lightly.

With regard to the Facebook page, Initiator 1 stated that "social media are both a blessing and a curse" (p. 4 Initiator 1). She emphasizes that even though social media offer many advantages in terms of reaching people, it also has its disadvantages, especially for the public Facebook page, since hateful comments by right-wing extremists occur on a daily basis. This was especially bad after the report about the death of a Syrian was discovered as false and *Moabit helps* was present in the German and international media for weeks due to its online presence and strong follower base. "But I do not discuss. Those people I block. This is

too ridiculous" (p. 3 Initiator 2). However, the initiator emphasizes that this kind of polarity nevertheless somehow is a form of advertising and thus may also have positive effects.

Nevertheless, the divisive nature of this incident shaped the format of communication and the use of their public Facebook page in the decision of *Moabit helps* to use the Facebook page merely for information purposes: "Our Facebook page is no discussion platform; we are here to inform. Either you support or you do not support" (p. 4 Initiator 3). This insight adds a new dimension to the use of the Facebook page as it explains the motives behind the specific focus on informational messages that were identified in the content analysis.

By limiting the Facebook page to a forum of information instead of discussion, civic engagement possibilities are also affected in the way that two-way communication between the initiative and the followers of the Facebook page is limited. Moreover, it can be argued that the initiative's social capital which is the encompassing sense of trustworthiness and reciprocity that arises from social connections among the individuals was damaged by the incident of the false report about the death of the refugee. Through trusting a group member that purposely spread this false information, this reputation of reliability and trustworthiness was damaged within the community of the initiative as well as to external social ties such as journalists or donors.

In terms of the strong focus on posts about donations with the action-related posts, Volunteer 3 explained that donation requests that are particularly urgent and high in number of items or money also get published on their public site. This way, they can reach more people more easily.

With regard to the use of certain topics, the volunteers monitoring the Facebook page state that some topics work better than others. Volunteer 1, for example stresses the necessity to be familiar with Facebook itself and know about which factors influence visibility on this social media platform. Although the goal of the initiative is to have as much engagement as possible, "this sometimes means that we publish posts which do not offer much content-wise but reach high engagement" (p.5 Volunteer 1).

Volunteer 3 gives more insights with regard to the use of visuals by stating that everything to do with stories about individual refugees is drawing the most engagement. Whereas violence, injustice, poor treatment in shelters all evoke strong emotions from followers, stories with a happy end do as well. For instance, "when a family that has lost their cat and found it again" (p. 5 Volunteer 3). He further states that "the use of images is most

important in order to appeal to people on all levels" (p. 6 Volunteer 3). Also, introducing a project that that is working well also leads to a strong positive reaction among the followers.

Initiators and volunteers agree that if a certain image is needed, it has to be used in a way that it is not dishonouring and violating the personal rights of people and that it is not showcasing or misusing someone. Volunteer 2 stresses that if pictures of children are used, for instance, is not done with the intention of producing a tear-jerker in that sense but more for spreading the word about the desolate conditions. Volunteer 4 and 5, who both are involved in monitoring the public Facebook page, see an important barrier in this widespread numbness within the society regarding issues of violence and catastrophes: "I think it is horrifying that we have developed in a way that it is necessary to show such photos, that we have become so visual that we cannot capture it with words anymore" (p. 6 Volunteer 5). If urgent help is needed, images might as well be used "under consideration of the end justifies the means" (p. 8 Volunteer 4).

However, while the content analysis of the overall engagement confirmed visuals of refugees to reach the highest engagement rates, the *Moabit helps* initiative does not appear to integrate that knowledge into their communication strategy. Still, visuals that show individual refugees are a rare sight on the Facebook page. One explanation for this may be that the initiators adapt to their overall strategy of informational posts which in turn limits the use of those kind of visuals.

4.2 Facebook Group

The Facebook group of *Moabit helps* was created on the 9th of October 2013. Within the course of two and a half years, it has grown to more than 15.000 members, most of them joining during the summer and autumn of 2015. The group is closed, meaning that only users can join that get accepted by one of eight administrators. The header contains a photo of the initiative's logo next to the slogan "Für eine solidarische und unterstützende Nachbar*innenschaft[8]". On the right side of the group page, a description can be found of how to get accepted into the closed group and basic information on the initiative. Sections on members, events, photos and files of the group are provided.

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[8] English translation: "For a solidary and supportive neighbourhood"

The closed Facebook groups distinguishes itself from the other online platforms in two ways: First, the majority number of posts is not made by the official account of *Moabit helps* but by group members, and second, the group is closed by default, meaning that posts cannot be viewed by outside audiences.

4.2.1 The Facebook Page as a Safe Space

Function

The closed nature of the Facebook group and the authors being group members resulted in some key differences with regard to the other public online platforms. First, the content analysis showed that vast majority of posts have the function of "action". With a share of 48 percent, it is the dominant function, followed by "community" (30 percent) and "information" (22 percent). Particularly prominent in terms of action are posts that seek the help of other group members. This is interesting, as this specific social media use within the group is primarily aimed at mobilization, whether it is for collecting donations or gathering people together for a common cause. This use of social media for action purposes can further be divided into two levels of use: firstly, group members are frequently asking questions on practical issues and call for action and help with doctor appointments, legal advice, language courses, accommodation or simply every-day goods in the form of donations:

> *SYRIAN MUSICIANS WANTED! For the spring festival of the […] Society on April 13, we are looking for Syrian musicians, in the best case already an established band ... of course for money! Thank you for any tips and hints!*

> *Dear group, dear friends,*
> *I am interested if there is a person within our ranks who has any comprehensive knowledge about the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act that they would be willing to share with interested parties through a workshop in more detail. Who would be interested?*

> *Looking for reliable, fluent German-speaking, female phone translation from Farsi for tomorrow from 16:30 until 17:00.*

Secondly, the initiators call the community to action with regard to upcoming demonstrations, donations, or events:

Come to the Alexanderplatz, Neptune Fountain, today at 15.00. We have to do something against the fact that their human dignity is taken from people for months.

Posts with the function of "community" were the second most-prevalent function within the Facebook group. Here, it is primarily the initiators that utilize the group to thank their countless helpers for their practical support:

Thanks to those who over the months / years have helped with cleaning, phone calls, translating, donating, cooking and so much more to do help people in need! You are just great.

In terms of "information", the posts in the Facebook group mostly contained updates on the initiative's work, followed by news on developments of the refugee crisis. Those posts also included updates on developments in Berlin politics that were relevant for refugee issues. For the most part, those informational posts were posts that had originally been posted on the Facebook page of *Moabit helps* and then shared to the group.

What distinguishes this Facebook group from the other platforms is the great amount of dialogue among the group members. Frequently, initiators and volunteers comment on posts by group members in order to help out. The great amount of dialogue results in a swarm intelligence approach to solving urgent problems and more so, appears to be the key difference to the other online platforms. This suggests that the rich amount of dialogue between the different group members emerges due to the safe space which the closed Facebook group symbolizes. Once the threat of right-wing targeting is removed, another dimension of social media use for engagement purposes emerges that is more practical and concrete. Since the closed nature of the group requires an admission from administrators, not everyone can join, for instance, evident right-wing extremists and Pegida supporters are not accepted as they would undermine the purpose of the group and hinder its activities.

Format

Topic-wise, all four identified categories were present in the Facebook group. Standing out, however, were posts on pro-refugee activism, more precisely, refugee projects, demonstrations and partnerships. Closely related to this were the links that mostly led to informative content on refugee issues published by other initiatives and organizations or other Facebook groups that group members recommended:

> *This group offers free bike riding lessons for female refugees in Berlin: https://www.facebook.com/…*

> *My university is offering scholarships for refugees. It's a great school with global recognition. All info as follows: http://www…*

All of this can also be seen as a form of exchange of knowledge and information between the different group members.

With regard to visuals, the most notable difference to the other channels was the high amount of pictures of refugees. This can again be related to the safe space of the Facebook group. While the public Facebook page of *Moabit helps* gets targeted by right-wing activists quite often, this is avoided by the closed nature of the group. Often, pictures of women and children in need of items or goods such as strollers or shampoos were shown. This is interesting as it suggests the initiative's use of social media is aimed at constructing a different vision of the refugees within the Facebook group than on the official Facebook page. Here, a more personal and vulnerable image of the refugees is constructed. This emphasizes the high level of trustworthiness within the group which is an important antecedent for civic mobilization. Since the members of the group all share the same world-view on helping refugees, those images are posted in a safe space.

Most engagement in the Facebook group occurs through the comments. However, it is harder to measure it since often posts get one answer that is a direct solution to a problem and therefore disappear quickly in the stream of the posts. Therefore, posts that ask for opinions generally get the most engagement.

4.2.2 Mobilization through Swarm Intelligence

The findings from the content analysis were confirmed within the findings taken from the interviews. For instance, Initiator 1 stated that due to the Facebook group's safe space, a significant part of their organization and mobilization efforts take place via the Facebook group. With 15.000 members, a broad spectre of people can be reached. Initiator 1 states that the functioning of the group is dependent on the swarm intelligence of those members. This well-developed swarm intelligence also reflects itself in the way that posts classified as "action" receive the most engagement at the fastest rate. Volunteer 2 emphasizes that the initiative depends on people who have information and therefore holds an open door policy, meaning that everybody is welcome who wants to contribute to the initiative's mission. In the Facebook group, this leads to people from outside the core group of the initiative contributing and giving input, each of them with at a different level of information.

Posts in the Facebook group have a more personal character as every member is checked before being admitted to the group in order to exclude extreme right-wing extremists. The admission process is controlled by administrators who work as volunteers at *Moabit helps*.

Initiator 3 states that the use of images is most important in order to appeal to people on all levels: "People have to be able to feel it, it has to be serious, sometimes it also has to have emotions since it is a highly emotional topic, at most for the refugees who are waiting here and go through all of that. Our emotions do not even come close to that" (p. 7 Initiator 3). For instance, if a baby buggy is needed for a mother, a picture is being taken of the mother and the babies in the hope that someone donates their old one. Initiator 2 stresses that this is not done with the intention of producing a tear-jerker in that sense but more for spreading the word about the desolate conditions.

The volunteer involved in the management of the group further confirmed the findings that in contrast to the public Facebook page, the closed group uses more pictures of refugees. Volunteer 3 explains that this is for the reason that all group members care about the issue, can identify with the cause and thus have lower emotional barriers than people who just come across the initiative's public Facebook page.

Volunteer 1 further states that the Facebook group is particularly useful for mobilization purposes and building a community due to its ability of gathering people who all

have the same goal. While Putnam (2002) deprived online interactions of social capital since it allegedly is only able to connect like-minded people in contrast to people with diverse opinions and backgrounds, I argue that in connecting the swarm intelligence in the Facebook group with this character of a safe space, people with diverse backgrounds and opinions come together for a common goal of wanting to help other people. This common goal is, in my opinion, the only like-mindedness among the diverse members. Also, the swarm intelligence of the group is working well due to the diversity of knowledge, opinions and information as well as their social ties that every member brings to the table. While some might know foreign languages that help with translating documents for the refugees, others might have valuable connections to lawyers or doctors. Besides that, it lies the nature of the definition of a group or community to bring people together that have at least one thing in common, be it sociodemographic, behavioral or intra-personal aspects. The one aspect in this case, helping refugees, makes people unite in the form of the community of *Moabit helps*.

On another note, the interviews also brought some new perspectives to the use of the Facebook group. While the mobilization of collective resources through the swarm intelligence appears to work well within the Facebook group, Initiator 3 states that size of the group and the resulting lack of knowledge among the group members about each other appears to be quite a significant barrier in terms of offline mobilization: "Even though we are over 15.000 members now in our group, at demonstrations that we organize, sometimes only 100 of them show up. This is annoying since the organizing of events costs us quite a lot of money" (p. 6 Initiator 3). Although the swarm intelligence appears to be a useful resource in the within the Facebook group, effective mobilization for offline events appears to require a personal connection.

On the other hand, Volunteer 1, gives insights into the motivations of the members of the group:

"Many people are here because they have seen the inhumane conditions outside the LaGeSo with their own eyes. I don't think the most part of them is helping because of a bad conscience but it is more that they were shocked by the conditions that people have to endure here. I think many wanted to do something to end this injustice and have started to do so in doing plenty of little things to improve the conditions for the refugees here, for example donating clothes" (p. 7 Volunteer 1).

Besides that, the interviews showed that for the communication within the group, also Facebook Messenger plays a hidden role which could not be detected through the content analysis. Initiator 3, for example states that "I always tell people to send me a personal message. I will see that tonight at 10 p.m. and will still remember it and then I can take care of it" (p. 11 Initiator 3). For demonstrations and events, messenger is an important tool for bringing together an initial group that is responsible for their organization. Facebook Messenger hereby used in combination with the Facebook group to communicate in the initial stages. Then, a separate planning group is set up and after this, an event is created which is shared in the group.

4.3 Twitter Page

The Twitter page of *Moabit helps* was founded on the 9th of October 2015. Within the time of six months, it has gained over 1300 Followers. Just as the Facebook page, the Twitter page uses the initiative's logo as a profile picture. and a header image that shows a combination of images, amongst others the painting of the globe and the handprints in different colours. Next to the pictures, the header states "Für eine solidarische und unterstützende Nachbar*innenschaft[9]" The biography section on the Twitter page contains a number of hashtags, namely #RefugeesWelcome, #Moabithilft, #FluechtlingeWillkommen[10], #Berlinhilft[11], #HoffnungstattAngst[12], #LaGeSo, #Fluechtlingspolitik[13] and #Fluechtlingskrise[14]. At the same time, those hashtags give an overview of the hashtags used most frequently in their tweets. Below this section, a link to their website is provided.

4.3.1   Twitter as a Tool of Information and Networking

The content analysis of the Twitter page showed clear differences to Facebook. For once, the number of posts was considerably smaller than on the Facebook channels. Also, the number

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[9] English translation: "For a solidary and supportive neighbourhood"
[10] English translation: "Refugees welcome"
[11] English translation: "Berlin helps"
[12] English translation: "Hope instead of fear"
[13] English translation: "Refugee politics"
[14] English translation: "Refugee crisis"

of posts that could also be found on the initiative's other online platforms was very small, meaning that *Moabit helps* publishes different content on different social media platforms.

Function

In terms of information, action and community, the content analysis showed that on Twitter, the functions were distributed as the following (information with 37 percent, action with 29 percent and community with 22 percent). However, in comparison to the other online platforms, Twitter appears to be used in a different way.

For instance, informational messages on Twitter differ from other social media platforms by extensively informing about the refugee crisis and barely talking about the initiative's own work. This is mostly done by retweeting content by news outlets or journalists:

Moabithelps retweeted @bjokie: The hatred of refugees does not even pause on Christmas. In Baden-Württemberg, a planned accommodation was burned on Christmas Eve. #coldland https://t.co/3dMsAQOqUJ

Community posts on Twitter primarily focus on acknowledging the work of other initiatives by retweeting their projects to the own page. In addition, the aspects of giving thanks and recognition to their followers play a role:

#moabithelps says THANK YOU to all Refugee and NonRefugee supporters <3 #refugeeswelcome #refugees #LaGeSo

With regard to action, the main focus lies on promoting their own events as well as events by similar initiatives and organizations:

Moabithelps retweeted @SZ "Our pastor to stay in #Zorneding!" 5000 + sign the petition here: https://t.co/mQjATtkHwq

Quite often, promoting their own events is done in the form of a link to their Facebook event. What is more interesting is that *Moabit helps* also quite often promotes events by other initiatives and organizations in the field of humanitarian aid in the context of the refugee

crisis. A closer look at the nature of those other initiatives indicates that there are relevant connections between the initiatives working in the same field and shows that *Moabit helps* is not only connected to networks of civic engagement initiatives within Berlin but all over Germany.

Format

Topic-wise, posts on Twitter have a strong focus on experience reports. The reports can consistently be found throughout the whole sample and appear in the form of screenshots of text. To the same degree, many posts focus on inhumane conditions for refugees:

> *Stop the inhumane conditions in the #LAGeSo! DEMO Sunday 18 o'clock #moabithelps #refugeeswelcome #refugees*

The posts showcase the living conditions of the refugees as well as document the slow process of the German administrations and waiting times for refugees to receive their papers that sometimes take moths.

In terms of the use of links, the relation to the characteristics of Twitter being a news source is apparent as *Moabit helps* frequently retweets information by newspapers, journalists, politic actors or private individuals which then link to the respective content. In this research, hashtags were also considered a type of link since they function as a link to other tweets with the same specific topic. Here, *Moabit helps* most frequently uses #RefugeesWelcome, the German equivalent #FluechtlingeWillkommen, #Moabithilft, and #LaGeSo. While the first two are very common on a national as well as international level to finding content about the refugee crisis in general, #Moabithilft and #LaGeSo are specific to the initiative and filter content with regard to news about *Moabit helps*. Due to their frequent usage within Germany, the first two hashtags appear to be more useful for reaching Twitter users since a higher number of people can engage in the discussion. The specific hashtags, on the other hand, only reach people that know about the initiative and actively want to inform themselves about news related to *Moabit helps*.

With regard to visuals, posts strongly vary compared to Facebook. On Twitter, the main difference is that visual images of graphics such as comics, infographics or quotes are much more frequently used.

Besides that, engagement on Twitter was harder to measure since it was considerably lower compared to the Facebook platforms. Although the initiative's follower count is at approximately 1300 Twitter users, its effectivity remains debatable with engagement rates often remaining in the single digits.

4.3.2 Twitter as a Complementary Communication Channel

The in-depth interviews revealed that the initiators regard Twitter as a pure source of information and information sharing. They state that on Twitter, people who are not on Facebook sporadically receive information about what the initiative is doing and about what has happened recently. However, the platform is not of any communicative importance for the initiative. Initiator 2 indicates that this is also because no one working at the initiative is familiar with the use of Twitter and that they are still learning from their Twitter use every day. She emphasizes though that it still is a platform where initiatives should be active on because Twitter is for those who do not use other platforms.

Volunteer 5 believes that Twitter is not a suitable platform for a civic engagement initiative since the platform is not developed for engaging in dialogue with followers. She argues that, additionally, on Twitter, there is always the requirement for some news reference and in 160 characters, it is not possible to present much. In 160 characters, more specifically, it is not possible to generate as much emotion how you need it for something to happen. Also with regard to the relationship with the press, even though journalists are often considered to be very active on Twitter due to its news character, the initiative rarely gets contacted by journalists because of something they posted on Twitter. For demonstrations or other events that are organized, Moabit helps merely shares them to Twitter to increase their reach.

Compared to the one-way informational use of Facebook and the use of the group to mobilize people for instant help through dialogue, the dialogue on Twitter only takes place in the form of re-tweeting content by other organizations. While this is also an important function of creating a network of initiatives under a common goal, the communication with followers remains limited.

Overall, this use of Twitter implies that important barriers exist in the lack of skills of the volunteers and initiators for the use of Twitter. With regard to how this research on

Twitter is used by a civic engagement initiative, those barriers with regard to know-how limit the volunteers and initiators' ability to communicate properly on Twitter and therefore minimize the potential of the social media platform.

4.4 Website

The website of *Moabit helps* is kept in a simple design. The header shows a simplified version of the initiative's logo. Overall, the website contains ten different sections, each of them providing information on a different aspect. The top navigation of the page contains nine of those sections, namely the front page, about us, working groups, requirement lists, Syria working group, gallery, contact and donations. Additionally, on the right of the main content column, a sidebar contains recent news, on the left, a preview of items from the gallery is shown.

4.4.1   The Website as an Output for Information

The front page of the website contains several entries that serve as announcements and status updates on recent noteworthy developments or events. The section on "About us" contains information on how the initiative was founded, gives an overview of its goals, gives examples of project the initiative has done within the past years. Additionally, contact information is provided for people that want to participate in the initiative's projects. "Working groups" includes an overview of diverse working groups within *Moabit helps* with a short description and information about what they do and who they are looking for. The section of "Requirement lists" contains links to the different requirement lists, on the one hand those of the initiative, and on the other hand of requirement lists of initiatives operating in the same field. "Syria working group" provides information on a newly founded association, BALADNA, which addresses refugees from Syria and the Middle East, including contact and counselling hours. In the "Gallery" section, photo albums from different events are posted. "Contact" includes address, email contact and phone numbers of *Moabit helps* as well as a contact field for contacting the activists directly on their website. The section on "donations" contains the initiative's bank account details. Additionally, the right sidebar contains news in the form of small reports highlighting several events.

Those sections were analysed in terms of elements relating to the functions of information, action and community in order to being able to compare its use to the use of the social media pages. Although the website as a more traditional form of communication with limited interaction possibilities cannot offer the participatory environment of social media, still, elements identified in the content analysis of the social media pages, were found and will be explained for each of the sections.

Function

Overall, most sections have the key function of information. Whether it is information on the work of the initiative, current updates of the requirement lists or contact information, the all primarily inform the reader about the initiative's actions or the ways to support them. The only exception is the front page of the website, on which entries of several functions were found. While the number of entries on the front page are are limited, they can mostly be classified as informational as many of them are press releases or updates on important organizational matters. However, some entries can be classified as action, examples being a call for donations for a Syrian family. Also, some community related entries can be found on the front page, for instance, thank-you-entries such as "SOLIDARITY with Moabit helps - THANK YOU!". Moreover, a "donate" button on the front-page could also be labelled as a call to action.

Format

Occurring topics are limited to the category of Pro-refugee activism, primarily concerning refugee projects. This fits with the informational character of the website. Its primary function is to inform about its own projects, activities and current events.

Furthermore, on the whole website, the use of visuals is limited. Instead, this part is kept for the section of the gallery which contains several albums that each compass a couple of photos taken at the initiative's recent events. The images, however cover the whole range of codes for visuals that were identified in the content analysis. All of them were taken at events organized for refugees by *Moabit helps*. On the one hand, this includes pictures of demonstrations and project work, while on the other hand, many pictures of refugee families and children are presented.

The use of links on the website is limited to non-existent. However, there is one link on the front page that directly leads to an online form that enables the user to directly make a donation to the initiative. Also, in the case of the website, engagement could not be measured by this content analysis since there are no accessible interactive sections.

In conclusion, the main function of the website is to inform about the activities of the initiative. This is due to the missing of interactive features which are available on social media platforms on the other hand. In comparison with the social media pages, the website does not offer much interactivity or dialogue. It only offers output from the initiative, and while contact opportunities are stated in the form of e-mail addresses, this communication then does not take place on the actual website.

4.4.2   Limited Maintenance of the Website

Initiator 1 explains that the website of Moabit helps is rather static for the reason that there is nobody who is willing to look after it on a voluntary basis. This is interesting because it indicates that the priority of the website appears to be relatively low in contrast to the social media pages where people are active.

The website functions as a source of basic information since "there are still people who do not want to be on Facebook" (p. 12 Initiator 3). This also shows that it is merely held as an additional platform in addition to the more important social media channels. However, volunteer 2 and 3 state even though the website is a pure information platform, it is important in terms that it is the one place where people can look up the highly important requirement lists. Those lists are constantly updated and contain the main items needed at LaGeSo, mainly hygiene products and clothes, sometimes baby buggies and are of high relevance for *Moabit helps* as the link to it is shared on the social media pages as well and is their way of letting their followers know what exactly they currently need.

However, the initiators all agree that the main purpose of the website is output, meaning that it functions as a one-way-communication from the initiative to the readers of the website. Input, where people can engage in a dialogue with the initiative, is reserved for the social media platforms.

Moreover, the website serves as organizing contacts as there are two mail contacts provided on the website, one of them is info@moabit-hilft.com, the other is press@moabit-

hilft.com. Volunteer 4 explained that this distinction helps with the high number of press inquiries directly going to the press mail address.

In relation to the social media pages, the website on the one hand is publicly accessible like the Facebook page. However, it does not provide users with the opportunity to leave a publicly visible comment on any of the contents. Therefore, it is in one way a protected space, but not in another way.

4.5 Previous Experience with Social Media and Activism

While the previous chapters gave an insight on how the different online platforms come to be imagined within the overall communicative practices of *Moabit helps*, the in-depth interviews also provided information about what kind of role the online platforms play in engaging the respondents.

The in-depth interviews showed evidence of increasing levels of civic engagement in the people involved in this study, initiators as well as volunteers. On the one hand, the initiators of *Moabit helps* have all had previous experience in community work in the sense that they have participated in similar movements. This includes charitable work, organizing flea markets for charities, participating in vegan communities or organizing a get together for homeless youth. In addition, the three initiators were part of each other's personal networks before setting up the initiative, however, they were not working together in any way before *Moabit helps*. While all of the initiators mainly held experience with organizing offline activism, setting up social media pages mostly was a new form of engagement for them: "When I created the Facebook group, I was overwhelmed by the amount of responses that came together so quickly, it was all new for me" (p. 3 Initiator 1).

On the other hand, the volunteers that participated in this study, all became engaged through seeing the early Facebook posts by the initiative during the summer of 2015, yet, none of them has had previous experience with activism. In addition, while all five volunteers are very active on Facebook, their experience with Twitter was limited.

4.6 Summary of Results

The content analysis in combination with the interviews showed that there are similarities as well as key differences in the use of the different online platforms, with regard to how they are used and which messages are circulated through them as well as to why they are used in this specific way and for what reasons and motivations.

The findings showed that the Facebook page is primarily being used as a channel of information. This specific use of informational messages is partly due to the decision of the initiators to use the public Facebook merely for informational purposes following the hate-comments after the false report of a refugee in order to not provide right-wing extremists with a public platform for discussion.

The closed Facebook group, on the other hand, is primarily being used for mobilizing followers through the group's swarm intelligence in matters of instant calls for help and action. The closed nature of the group further makes it a safe space, furthering a rich extent of dialogue and contributions from group members.

The Twitter page is mainly being used as a complementary channel for reaching new audiences with information about developments in the refugee crisis. Moreover, the use of retweeting content from similar initiatives contributes to creating a network of civic engagement initiatives on this online platform. Besides that, hashtags are used for encouraging a broader Twitter audience to engage in the discussion. However, limited know-how of the initiator and volunteers question the effectiveness of this platform.

The website is merely being used for informational purposes for people without accounts on social media. Its most important function is that it contains the requirement lists which are always updated with the latest items that are needed at the LaGeSo. However, due to the limited maintenance of the website compared to the social media platforms, its purpose within the broader communication of Moabit helps though remains questionable.

The content analysis aimed to provide a concise picture of the actual practices of use of the diverse online platforms. It showed that within the messages that are circulated through the platforms, there are certain differences but also similarities in the specific use. Some of those appear to be due to strategic choices, for example, differences exist within the same platform with the primary function being information within the Facebook page and action within the Facebook group. On the other hand, some choices in the use of social media

appear to be due to limited knowhow, such as the inept use of Twitter for engaging with its followers.

Some findings from the content analysis were confirmed in the interviews, for instance, the use of more personal and vulnerable visuals in the Facebook group was reflected in the explanation of the initiative of the group providing a safe space. For the reason that all group members care about helping refugees, they have lower emotional barriers to this vulnerable content than people who just come across the initiative's public Facebook page.

Overall, the initiators as well as the volunteers perceive the Facebook group as the most useful and most effective social media platform for civic activism. Although they argue that they do not have many platforms to compare, the Facebook group clearly stands out because of its many possibilities (pictures, text, events) and the successful swarm intelligence. For once, this swarm intelligence offers the possibility react quickly, for the people working at the initiative as well as for the other group members. There is always someone who can react and provide instant help if necessary. The Facebook group further allows a high level of a certain flexibility. "Moabit helps would not exist without Facebook. It would not work. We need this platform. It is absurd, but this is the way it is." (p. 10 Initiator 1).

5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore how social media are used by a civic engagement initiative in the context of the refugee crisis. By applying a case study approach and investigating this subject through the methods of content analysis and in-depth interviews, a case study of the social media use of the German civic engagement initiative *Moabit helps* was conducted. While the content analysis examined sub-question 1, *how the different online platforms are used and what messages are circulated through the different online platforms for what purpose,* the in-depth interviews investigated sub-question 2, *why they are used in this specific way and what reasons and motivations lie behind this kind of use.*

5.1 Answer to the Research Question

This case study on how social media are used by a civic engagement initiative is a specific issue about engagement around helping other people in the community, particularly people who have a controversial political status, the refugees. In that sense, the use of social media is strongly bound to the context of the case and its context. The divisive nature of the refugee issue in Germany and its outcomes (e.g. hate comments) further influence the overall communicative practices of *Moabit helps*, which has a particular impact on the messages on the initiative's public Facebook page.

This study has shown that the Facebook page is predominately used for the purpose of information. While the Facebook page was previously also used for engaging in dialogue with followers, the wave of hateful comments in response to the false report of the death of a 24-year old Syrian refugee in January 2016 made the initiators decide to limit this kind of use.

The influence of this polarizing context of the refugee crisis on the findings is also evident in the closed Facebook group. The closed nature of the group helps to build a safe space, where a rich extent of dialogue and contributions from group members take place, while excluding un-called for opinions (e.g. racism). The safe space of this closed Facebook group is primarily being used for mobilizing followers through the group's swarm intelligence in matters of instant calls for help and action. Both, the initiators as well as the volunteers perceive the Facebook group as the most useful and most effective social media platform for civic activism. They agree that the swarm intelligence within the group offers the possibility

react quickly, which is important in the field of humanitarian aid since there is always the need to being able to provide instant help if necessary.

While Twitter is still mainly used as a complementary channel for reaching new audiences, the people working at *Moabit helps* consider it a learning process. With hashtags such as #RefugeesWelcome, the initiative aims at encouraging a broader Twitter audience to engage in the discussion around the refugee issue.

The official website is solely used for informational purposes for people without social media accounts. Its most important function is that it contains the requirement lists which are always updated with the latest items that are needed at the LaGeSo. However, due to the limited maintenance of the website compared to the social media platforms and its limited target audience, its purpose within the broader online environment of *Moabit helps* remains questionable. This may be a predictor of how websites might lose their relevance within the broader picture of future communication practices in civic activism.

Overall, this study found that the different online platforms are used in distinct, specific ways. In some ways, the context of the refugee crisis determines the nature of the communicative practices more than in others. The important aspect here is that strategies are shaped through positive and negative experiences with the different online platforms over time. This reflects itself in the way that the use of the Facebook page became limited to a certain degree through the extreme negative experience with the false report, on the other side, the use of Twitter is gradually growing over time with the initiators and volunteers collecting know-how through personal experience about what works on this platform and how to use this technology for the best outcome.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Based on the findings of this study, multiple implications arise for theory. Firstly, literature appeared to suggest a distinction between political and civic engagement (Ekman & Åmna, 2012). While the former is about politics, the latter deals with community life. This study showed that this distinction cannot be drawn that easily, particularly when it comes to civic engagement initiatives that are stepping in where politics failed. This research about the case of *Moabit helps* showed that this kind of engagement is not solely a case of humanitarian aid on the community level; through constantly addressing issues such as governmental and

administrational failure in their posts and tweets, the initiative directly calls out the responsible political actors and institutions. In fact, in the case of *Moabit helps*, the initiative functions as an intermediary between the community of citizens and refugees on the one side and politics on the other side. Therefore, studying this particular case showed that the boundaries between political and civic engagement are rather blurred than a clear-cut distinction. While there may be cases that clearly classify as one or the other, there is a broad range of engagement that has a strong relation to both dimensions.

Besides that, this study showed evidence of increasing levels of civic engagement in the participants involved in this study. While the initiators of *Moabit helps* have all had experience in community work or charitable work in the sense that they have participated in similar movements, the volunteers mostly came to be engaged through seeing the Facebook posts of the initiative. Also, while all of the initiators mainly hold experience with offline activism, setting up social media pages was a new form of engagement for them. In this sense, social media have played a decisive role in increasing civic engagement for the initiators as well as for the volunteers. On the one hand, through enabling new perspectives and opportunities for the experienced initiators, and on the other hand, by leading Facebook users without any experience in activism to be engaged within such an initiative.

In terms of social capital and social media, this study found that the encompassing sense of trustworthiness and reciprocity that arises from social connections among the members of a community is essential for the existence of a digitally organized initiative. This was made clear when the social network of the initiative suffered from the false reporting in terms of hate comments and trust within the press. The sense of trust was damaged within the members of the *Moabit helps* community as well as with outside connections, resulting in decrease in reputation. Since the false report was issued by a volunteer who had been working at the initiative for some months, strong ties as well as weak ties that had been developed towards the core team around the initiators of *Moabit helps* were damaged to a great extent and took months to rebuild.

With regard to social ties, Gladwell (2010) has claimed that social media only foster the creation of weak ties. However, he argues that while weak ties can direct a large number of individuals to a Facebook page, it is still questionable whether those people can be mobilized through social media in an effective way. As explained by the initiator from *Moabit helps*, the deficiency of personal relationships through social media is a significant barrier in

terms of mobilization purposes. While weak ties provide a useful resource in the form of a swarm intelligence within the Facebook group, effective mobilization for offline events in this case appears to require a personal connection.

Literature further suggested that people tend to limit their exposure to information that stands in contrast to their own beliefs and instead expose themselves to information that reinforces their opinions (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). With regard to this debate of homophily, his study made two observations.

Firstly, the public nature of the Facebook page in connection with the highly divisive issue of the false report about the death of the refugee resulted in heated discussion on this public Facebook page with hate comments by right-wing extremists on the one side and supporters of *Moabit helps* on the other side. In this sense, a highly polarizing topic brings together people from opposite opinions. With regard to the polarizing issues, the development towards Facebook as a discussion forum for people with extreme positions could be observed in the context of the refugee crisis in particular. Since it is a highly dividing issue within the German population, Facebook pages of initiatives and organizations associated with the refugee crisis as well as newspaper articles published on Facebook become the place of heated discussions. For this reason, it can be argued that the idea of an echo-chamber does not apply to public Facebook pages and groups as they bring people with diverse backgrounds and opinions together.

Secondly, although it can be argued that closed Facebook groups such as the one of *Moabit helps* bring together like-minded people in the sense that they share the common wish to help other people in need, beyond that, any kind of group is characterized by people having something in common. In this sense, this study showed that social media environments support the of formation of a diversity of opinions rather than homogeneous groups, particularly when the topic of discussion is highly divisive within the online community.

5.3 Strengths and Limitations

One of the key strength of this study was its methodological triangulation. Through combining two different methods that investigated different aspects of the same phenomenon, a holistic account of the social media use could be achieved. While the content analysis offered first

observations of the communicative practices within the actual use, the interviews complemented the research by offering explanations for this specific use as well as new valuable perspectives on how social media come to be used. Through analysing four different online platforms in detail as well as conducting in-depth interviews with eight respondents further provided this study with a richness of data that contributed to the validity and reliability of this study as well as to a holistic picture of how social media come to be imagined by a civic engagement initiative.

Another strength of this study was the case that was chosen for analysis. This is particularly because of the initiative's negative experience with social media. The knowledge gained through this research on social media use by civic engagement initiatives in such situations gives valuable insights especially with regard to the previously mentioned development of public Facebook pages into discussion forums used for the exchange of extreme opinions, often escalating into hate speech. In this sense, this research offers insight on how initiatives may deal with a crisis situation and react to this trend towards hate speech on Facebook.

Despite these strengths, certain limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting these findings. First of all, the case study methodology comprises several limitations. First, since in this study, it was only one investigator collecting the data, this could potentially have led to a bias in data collection and influenced in the direction of findings and conclusions. Second, further limitations concern the generalizability of this study. Since only the social media use of one particular civic engagement initiative was examined, the results necessarily be generalized to similar cases. However, since this exploratory study was intended to be a first step in the direction of developing an established framework on social media practices in civic engagement, this issue of generalizability can be addressed through conducting further research on this issue, for instance, by replicating this study.

Moreover, certain limitations emerged during the data collection process of the content analysis. Hereby, the high number of average posts of 15 posts per day, which would have resulted in a sample of over 2700 posts, made a random sample of 200 posts necessary. Since this only accounted for less than ten percent of the actual posts within that time frame, many posts were left out, which could have resulted a different distribution of types of function and format within those posts and thus influenced the direction of the findings.

Finally, in terms of the content analysis of the closed Facebook group, certain ethical issues arise with regard to privacy matters. In contrast to making a post on a public page where one is aware of its public accessibility, the nature of closed groups suggests a certain atmosphere of privacy due to its limited audience. Since the researcher became am a member of this group in order to access the posts, however, some of the allegedly "closed" information left the safe space of this group by being included in this thesis. For those privacy reasons, the names of the authors from the Facebook group were excluded in this study and links within their posts were shortened.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

This study makes a contribution to existing literature in several ways. When in fact most previous work focused almost exclusively on *whether* social media is used, this study explored *how* social media is used *for what purpose* and *why* it is used in this specific way. Since no framework existed for evaluating the social media use for civic engagement purposes, this research further aimed to fill this gap in literature.

However, as the methodological choices made in this study partly originate from previous research in the related field of advocacy and non-profit communications, the framework that was adapted for this exploratory study has to be tested in future research to see if it can be transferred to civic engagement and social media. This could include replicating this study in the form of investigating the social media use of similar civic engagement initiatives that are active in the context of the refugee crisis or humanitarian aid or transferring and adapting the framework to civic engagement initiatives operating in related or distinct fields.

In this context, future research of social media use should consider taking a qualitative inductive coding approach to the key functions for which social media are used by a civic engagement initiative. While the functions adopted from the work on how non-profit organizations use Twitter by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) appeared to be applicable in this research, more suitable functions might emerge in terms of the particular context of civic engagement through choosing a qualitative inductive coding process.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Codebook

All examples included in this codebook were translated from German into English. The examples contain a mixture of fitting posts from the Facebook page, Facebook group and the Twitter page. With regard to the images provided in the category "visuals", all images are taken from the initiative's social media pages.

Table A 1 Function

Category	Example	Codes
Information	Moabit helps meets #LaGeSo president Dr. Muschter - conversation at eye level #refugeeswelcome #refugees	About the initiative
	RT @IOM_news Since 1 Jan 562 migrants have died or are missing along migratory routes, 410 in the Mediterranean #MissingMigrants	About the refugee crisis
Action	These were really bad days for refugees on the grounds of LaGeSo. We had to take care of incredible number of people during the last few days. The refugees in Berlin are hungry and even more often without shelter. They often only receive hygiene and food vouchers from volunteers like here in the House D. […] Moabit helps has had to invest 4474€ in hygiene and food vouchers this week to alleviate the worst hardship. We are running out of breath! We urgently need more hygiene products and food stamps. Please help to help others !!!	Donation appeal
	Stop the inhumane conditions in the #LAGeSo! DEMO Sunday 18 o'clock #moabithelps #refugeeswelcome #refugees	Promoting organizational event
	Is anyone free tomorrow morning time to accompany a Syrian refugee to a Job Center in Neukölln and translate german / english???? Would be so great!!! Thank you!!!	Call for volunteers and employees
	Tonight, [Initiator 1] has been invited by talk show host Anne Will for the topic: Citizen protests against refugee politics - Are they taken seriously enough? Turn in at 22:45h on ARD: https://daserste.ndr.de/annewill/	Direction to watch video/read article

	The call to stand up against racism - your voice against right-wing smear campaigns is supported by many well-known personalities. You should sign as well!	Join another site/vote for initiative
	A group of lawyers is offering free legal advice for refugees in emergency shelters. Contact for inquiries, information regarding the need for legal advice (at) wirmachendas.jetzt	Advocacy
Community	We bow before the state theatre Mainz for this form of civil resistance. No ground for misanthropy!	Acknowledgement of current and local events
	#moabithelps says THANK YOU to all Refugee and NonRefugee supporters <3 #refugeeswelcome #refugees #LaGeSo	Giving thanks and recognition
	correct @Fabio_reinhardt but nothing new #LaGeSo #moabithelps #refugeeswelcome #refugees https://twitter.com/Fabio_reinhardt/status/70827633 7807638528 …	Dialogue with followers

Table A 2 Format - Topic

Category	Example	Codes
Inhumane Conditions	Bewilderment, endless bewilderment. Currently there are 250-300 people waiting in front of the LaGeSo for tomorrow morning. The pressure momentarily was so big that a 21-year-old man became unconscious. The ambulance was on site for a long time. His health restored, he has now lined up again. When does the madness end?	Health issues Pregnancy Waiting lines at LaGeSo Living conditions Refugee camps
Political Response	Discrimination in asylum procedures by authorities failure #LaGeSo #moabithelps #refugeeswelcome #Refugees	Governmental failure Administrational failure Right-wing parties Anti-refugee behaviour
Pro-refugee Activism	#moabithelps & partners publish colouring book for children - Wednesday 23.3. 10am #LaGeSo #refugeeswelcome #refugees	Demonstrations Donations Anti-right-wing / pro refugee statements Refugee projects Partnerships
Refugee Reports	Report 15 February 2016 It is being said that it is getting better now. And again we have to hear that	Women and children Men Families

what is announced and what the waiting people are going through are worlds apart. Like last week, we have met grumbling refugees who showed us their appointment slips. We were allowed to take pictures of those belong to a 19-year-old man […] he merely got an appointment in 36 days! What has changed then? The desperation is just not visible anymore for everybody.

Table A 3 Format - Visuals

Category	Example	Codes
Graphics		Infographics Comics Quotes
Donations		Hygiene items Food stamps Packages Clothes
Demonstrations		Pro-refugee demonstrations Signs Crowds

Leaflets		Information leaflets Action leaflets
Experience Reports		Negative experiences Maladministration Exploitation of refugees Evidence
Moabit helps Community		Moabit helps team Team work Daily task at LaGeSo
Projects		Refugee projects Refugee workshops Products made by refugees Products made for refugees
Waiting Lines at LaGeSo		Long waiting lines Large crowds of people Tents Barriers Outside
Refugee Accommodations		Gym halls Mass accommodation Living conditions Shelter Beds

Refugee Camps		Refugee camps Idomeni
Individual Refugees		Children Women Men Families

Table A 4 Format - Links

Category	Example	Codes
Internal	Demo against the asylum package II 16.2 18 o'clock in front of the LaGeSo -> https://www.facebook.com/events/962417617161568/	Link to own Facebook page Link to own website Link to own Twitter page
Media	Moabit helps shared Süddeutsche Zeitung's post. Chronology of failure at LaGeSo. "New accusations against Czaja because of LaGeSO situation. Has senator Czaja ignored warnings from LaGeSo, and even prevented refugee accommodations due to pressure from party members?" Article by Sueddeutsche Zeitung. http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/vorwuerfe-gegen-czaja-chronologie-des-versagens-am-lageso-1.2790521	Link to newspaper articles Link to TV reports
Initiatives	Present for You makes packages for the children that have been forgotten by the senate. Whether it is milk, bottles, hygiene items or some snacks. With this packages comes a present. A doll or a car. Something for painting or kneading. Those packages that Present for You has been making for a while now, make a difference. Children are happy, parents are happy. Now, Present for You needs your support to keep this project alive. On BETTERPLACE you can help them out by donating. www.betterplace.org/p36514	Link to content published by initiatives / organizations / groups

Political actors	We are thanking <3 #moabithelps #refugees #refugeeswelcome https://twitter.com/15Piraten/status/697423074250137600 … Calling up on solidarity with @Moabithelps amongst others are @Fabio_reinhardt @martindelius @sozialpirat @piratenbaer http://www.fluechtlingsrat-berlin.de/lepton/media/pdf/Solidaritaetserklaerung_fuer_Moabit_hilft.pdf … #RefugeesWelcome	Link to content published by politicians or parties
Private individuals	Moabit helps retweeted @martingommel: Now the time has come when we have to show #solidarity with refugee even more resolutely and #solidarisieren and #protest against the right-wing.	Link to content published by private individuals

Table A 5 Format - Engagement

Category	Example	Codes
Engagement	123 Likes, 28 Shares and 196 Comments make up a total engagement of 347	Amount of likes, shares and comments combined
Comments	"Yes, and it is just fantastic that the whole world is pointing the finger at the Berlin people because they are the only ones who are not capable of organizing efficient processes."	Negative reaction Positive reaction Mixed reaction

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introduction

How did everything start? Where did the idea come from? (details)

1. PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

1a) Interest in issue

- Why did you consider this issue involved to be important to engage with?
  - How is this issue personally meaningful to you?
  - Why did you consider the refugees issue important to engage with?

1b) Previous experience with activism

- Did you have any past background or involvement around that issue (refugees)?

- Did you have any past experience with civic mobilization (other issue)?

1c) Previous experience with social media

Your initiative has an active online presence.

- Were you already actively using social media before you started this initiative? (blogs, social networking sites, content-sharing sites, collaboration sites, etc.)

- And for what purpose?

2. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

2a) Present social media use

- How did you use social media for this initiative? Tell me a bit about the organization's online activities.
  - Ask about role of Facebook page.
  - Ask about role of website.
  - Ask about Twitter.
  - Ask about other types of communication / media that were important for the initiative (face-to-face, email, etc.), for example for mobilization

- Why did you think that using social media to address this issue was appropriate?

- o Why did you think social media was appropriate tool to use in this context?

- Which social media did you find to be the best tool for your work and why/ why not?

2b) Social media strategy

- Did you specifically try to attract broader attention to the initiative and the refugees issue?
  - o How? What did you do for that purpose?
  - o What was the role played by social media?

- Does your initiative have an explicit strategy for using social media to advance their cause?
  - o Was it written down or shared with other members?

- How effective is that strategy? Please give examples.

- Are there any examples of social media hindering or working against your goals for this initiative?

2c) Collaborations facilitated through social media

- Were you collaborating with other social media users to raise awareness or discuss that issue?

- Did social media lead to collaborations with other initiatives or groups? Or how was this collaboration born?

- It seems you managed to attract a lot of attention from journalists. How did you build those relations? Did social media matter in any way?

2d) Offline mobilization

- Were you interested in initiating or joining offline collective action related to that issue?
  - o If yes… Tell me about the offline collective action you have organized.

- How did it work out?

- What role does social media play for the initiative in terms of offline mobilization?

- What do you think is the relationship between social media mobilization and offline mobilization?