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# Airline Brands on Twitter:
# Discovering What Consumers Value to Create a Stronger Social CRM Strategy

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## Abstract

**Title:** Airline Brands on Twitter: Discovering What Consumers Value to Create a Stronger Social CRM Strategy

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**Keywords:** Social Customer Relationship Management, Communication, Twitter, Airline, Customer Satisfaction

**Thesis purpose:** The objective of this research paper is to gain a clear understanding of consumer attitudes and expectations whilst engaging in conversation with airline brands on the social media platform Twitter. This paper seeks to understand what manner of interactions consumers find valuable, and if there is a method of ensuring a satisfying response from the airline. This will examine how airline brands can strengthen social CRM strategies on a theoretical level to offer consumers what they most value. Furthermore, this paper will identify and create a model in which to use to utilize for future interactions with consumers on Twitter in the airline industry. This thesis will address the specific question; how can airline brands satisfy consumer expectations with their social CRM strategy to best interact with consumers on Twitter? Additionally, the sub-question will be addressed; can traditional communication and customer satisfaction theories enhance airline brands social CRM strategies?
**Methodology:** In order to explore these questions in depth; first a comprehensive literature review of all relevant theories was completed. Next, a netnography study of 600 Twitter conversations were collected and coded in an attempt to gain insight and understanding of what consumers want and need from airlines on Twitter. This code was developed based on the data. Also, a self-completion web survey was used as a way to speak directly with consumers about airlines and Twitter.
**Theoretical perspective:** This paper examines the theories of; communication, customer satisfaction, empowered consumer, social CRM, as social media theories.
**Empirical data:** This mixed method study combines a netnography study of 600 Twitter conversations with a supplemental consumer self-completion web survey.
**Conclusion**: The most notable theoretical findings are that present social customer relationship management theories do not fully encompass the ever-changing and culturally significant social media platforms. Customer satisfaction theories and communication theories were considered as subset elements of customer relationship management theory, and while these could align with a basic understanding of the principles of CRM social media, they could not fully grasp unique culture of Twitter and the significance of the empowered consumer. Elements such as the reduced character count on Twitter and the expectations of immediate response need to be adapted to a more specific theory, which better understands this vast communication platform. We propose that while this theory begins to emerge, brands can utilize standard theories on communication and customer satisfaction to create a comprehensive social CRM strategy to build relationships with the empowered consumer. Knowing consumer expectations, and what the consumer values, will lead to a successful implementation of these concepts in social CRM. Additionally, many practical consumer wants and needs were discovered and a model was created. This model is to be used as a guideline for airline brand managers in order to best interact with consumers via Twitter.

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## Glossary of Terms

**Brands**: throughout the paper, all companies are referred to as “brands”

**Consumer**: throughout the paper, individuals are all referred to as “consumers”

**Legacy airline**: traditional airline, non-budget airline

**Social CRM**: Social Customer Relationship Management

## Tables and Figure Index

## 1. Introduction

Social media has been around for long enough for brands to realize not only the powerful marketing tool it is, but also how significant a resource it is for consumers. Platforms that were once introduced as social networks have now seen a shift to a way for consumers to not only receive messages from brands, but also a platform where consumers can also initiate contact and communication with brands directly. For brands, this can be a great resource to individually interact with consumers on a personal level. However, these platforms are also a very public way for consumers to point out issues, problems, and weaknesses within a brand. One complaint or upset consumer's message can easily be transferred and viewed globally within minutes, beyond the control of the brand. The platform Twitter, has seen a rise in this business and brand engagement function. As consumers take to Twitter to initiate conversations with brands, brands themselves must create and execute a plan in order to capitalize on this direct engagement with the consumers.

This means that social media is no longer solely a way in which brands can convey a message to consumers, but also a direct line of communication for the consumer to initiate with the brand. This further means that social media is even more important than just a marketing tool, it is also sometimes the primary communication between consumer and company (Kim and Eunju, 2012). In order to fully understand and utilize this platform, communication theory, customer satisfaction theory, as well as social CRM all must be examined in order to create a useful strategy for airline brands on Twitter.

## 1.1 Background

Social media has changed the way that individuals communicate and interact with each other, and also has changed the way that brands communicate, connect, and interact with consumers individually. While research has been completed on social media and brand management and marketing, there is still areas in which brands can improve and utilize social media for building stronger brands and stronger brand loyalty with their consumers (Neudecker et al, 2015). Social media has also created an arena in which individual consumers can very publicly address brands, where negative views and information is far more powerful than prior to the use of social media (Neudecker et al, 2015).

This paper addresses one specific area in which there is room for further evaluation and improvement, Twitter and the airline industry. While each industry differs, the airline in particular is a highly competitive industry with many brands competing for each consumer. With this level of competition, it is important for each brand to do everything they can to maintain consumer loyalty. Twitter is used by many airlines, but there is also many clear differences between airline brands on Twitter; some being very active, while others use Twitter solely for marketing purposes and do not engage in consumer interaction. Specifically, this paper addresses the situations where the consumer initiates communication directly with the brand via Twitter and analyzes how the responses from the airline brands in this situation are handled and what the outcome is from the consumers' point of view. This paper works to analyze responses of specific airlines and their interactions with consumers via the social media platform, Twitter.

Throughout the paper, individuals are all referred to as “consumers” and all companies are referred to as “brands”. This is an attempt to clearly identify the parties that are being discussed and analyzed without causing any confusion.

## 1.2 Research Purpose

The objective of this research paper is to gain a clear understanding of consumer attitudes and expectations whilst engaging in conversation with airline brands on the social media platform Twitter. This paper seeks to understand what manner of interactions consumers find valuable, and if there is a method of ensuring a satisfying response from the airline. This will examine how airline brands can strengthen social CRM strategies on a theoretical level to offer consumers what they most value. Furthermore, this paper will identify and create a model in which to use to utilize for future interactions with consumers on Twitter in the airline industry.

In order to truly utilize the benefits and capabilities of Twitter in a business and brand management sense, there must be a solid understanding of how value is perceived during the interactions with consumers via this platform. As Twitter is used increasingly as a way for consumers to initiate this connection between themselves and a brand, the brand must know how to reply in order to benefit the brand and to minimize potential issues. The airline industry is notoriously competitive and all brands in this industry need to be able to connect with their consumers as much as possible.

Furthermore, in order to understand these conversations and the consequences of these interactions, communication theory, customer satisfaction theory, and social CRM theory all must be viewed and analyzed in this Twitter and airline industry capacity.

## 1.3 Research Question

This thesis will address the specific question; how can airline brands satisfy consumer expectations with their social CRM strategy to best interact with consumers on Twitter? Additionally, the sub-question will be addressed; can traditional communication and customer satisfaction theories enhance airline brands social CRM strategies?

This question encompasses both theory and practical applications and will be analyzed in both manners. In order to create and implement a successful social CRM strategy, communication theory, customer satisfaction theory, and social networking theory must all be analyzed and applied. For practical application, the authors created a model that will offer a guideline to airlines on the best approach to responding to consumers on Twitter. This model was built on the theory components discussed, data collected, and has created a tool for practical application.

## 1.4 Research Limitations

This particular research study is focused on Twitter and the airline industry exclusively. We recognize that each social media platform is substantially different. Twitter is unique in that it limits the characters to 140 per post, severely limiting the response length of each entry. Twitter is the only social media platform that limits the amount of characters

in the responses, therefore it requires direct and to the point messages. This unique feature enables Twitter to be a unique study and requires further studies outside of the blanket research of "social media". This fact also changes the communication tools that can be utilized on this platform.

The airline industry itself is a unique industry and therefore we do not claim that this research can be applied to any other industries. In general, issues that consumers have with airlines' products tend to create a larger emotional response within the consumers view than other brands in other industries (Kee Mun and Ghazali, 2011). Furthermore the airline industry itself has had a "rollercoaster ride" over the past few years leading to higher rates of dissatisfaction and therefore requiring airlines to focus on remaining competitive (Kee Mun and Ghazali, 2011).

Due to the specific nature of this research, it is accepted that this research and subsequent model is specifically tailored to the airline industry and Twitter exclusively. While further research may be warranted in order to adapt or test either the theoretical findings or the model in other industries or platforms, this is outside the scope of this research paper.

## 1.5 Outline of Thesis

In order to explore the thesis question, first a literature review was completed to understand the theories behind communication, customer satisfaction, and social CRM. This comprehensive look at these theories explore not only the traditional applications,

but also looks at how each theory can be applied to the digital and social media setting of the current business world. Social networks and the empowered consumer concept were also explored in depth in relation to the theories and current business environment. Twitter is a unique social media platform and was explored to give a good explanation of how both consumers and brands are utilizing this platform. Furthermore, the airline industry was also researched to highlight how this industry differs from others.

In order to collect data for this thesis, a netnography study was designed and executed. 600 Twitter conversations were collected from six different airlines. Each conversation had to meet the predetermined guidelines of initial contact made by the consumer, at least one airline response, followed by another interaction with the consumer. Each conversation was then coded based on consumer codes, airline codes, and outcome codes. Each code was clearly defined in an attempt to remain consistent through the coding process. A consumer survey was also completed as complimentary data.

Many findings were apparent from the Twitter conversations that were coded as well as the survey respondents answered. In order to establish trends and significant data, eleven categories or arrangements of the data were completed, combining all consumer codes and airline codes with outcomes. Also, the data revealed significant differences in the airlines as well.

The findings were then analyzed based on the theory discussed in the literature review section. The data findings were used in an attempt to show how the theories either were applicable to Twitter in the airline industries or if there was room for further theory building needed. For practical purposes, a model was created as a way to guide brands how to respond to consumers via Twitter in hopes of increasing positive outcomes in Twitter conversations.

The main findings of this paper are that the present social CRM theories do not fully encompass the ever changing landscape of social media. Communication theories and customer satisfaction theories also fail to grasp the culture of Twitter or the significance of the empowered consumer. However, it is shown that brands can build a successful social CRM by predicting what consumers want and expect, and work towards offering consumers these things. The model is a practical way for airline brands to incorporate the theory to strengthen current social CRM strategies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Communication Theory

Traditionally, communication theory is simply the process of sending and receiving messages. However this simplistic approach has been viewed as too basic for understanding of the social process (Craig, 1999).

There are three central methods of communication; verbal, written and nonverbal. Verbal communication is all communication that is transmitted orally, written communication is all text, and nonverbal is primarily visual clues, which could be from body language or imagery (Carpenter, 2009). Each means of communication has its own relevance in difference contexts. Verbal communication has benefits in that it allows for immediate feedback and clear conveying of emotions, whereas written communication has an advantage for demonstrating clarity of information (Carpenter, 2009).

The theory of communication is an area of many different constructs and possibilities. Overall, communication theory is the theory of 'discourse about discourse' within which there are many attempts at defining the practice, but no one cemented model (Craig, 1999). This lack of alignment as to what specifically communication theory is can be related to the fact that communication theory had appeared independently throughout separate academic disciplines; literature, mathematics, psychology and business. This wide range of applications allows for a different interpretation and understanding of the field of communication theory (Craig, 1999).

### 2.1.1 Berlo's SMCR Model of Communication

One of the models that is suggested to put into practice the theory of communication is Berlo's SMCR model. The model is displayed as:

Source – Message – Channel – Receiver

This is the most traditional view of communication theory, where it is put into practice in a straight line, simply sending the message from the source to the receiver.

In this theory each stage in the model has its own elements for understanding. The 'source', the place where the message originates, is determined by its communication skills, its attitudes and knowledge, as well as the social system and culture within which it resides. The 'message', the information that is to be passed on, is determined by its content, its language or visual triggers, its structure and its transmission format. The 'channel' applies to the five senses in this model. This is how the message is passed on through either hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, tasting or a combination of those. Finally, the 'receiver' is the audience that receives the message – the receiver is affected by the same elements as the 'source' (Berlo, 1963). Berlo's model has the context that the source and the receiver must be on common ground for the conversation to flow accurately. This is a drawback that cannot always be practical in real life scenarios (MSG, 2015).

### 2.1.2 Lasswell's Model of Communication

As suggested, there are several different approaches to the understanding of communication theory in practice. Harold Lasswell constructed another of these that has been important in the field. Lasswell suggested that to understand the act of communication five questions must be answered. These are:

*Who? Says what? In which channel? To whom? With what effect? (Lasswell, 1948)*

Lasswell's model is similar in many ways to Berlo's, however with the addition of the final element that considers what the result of the communication was.

### 2.1.3 Schramm's Model of Communication

A further approach to the understanding of communication theory is by Schramm. Here the model differs in that the message travels in both directions. This can be seen as a simple, circular model where the message is perpetually moving between sender and receiver. This emphasizes the receiver's interpretation of the message, and his subsequent response based on that understanding. Schramm believes that in any instance of communication where the sender does not receive feedback, this has been and inconclusive and therefore void communication. Because of this, the interpretation of the message is critical (MSG, 2013). As suggested by Berlo, Schramm also considers the cultural elements of the sender and receiver to be crucial in the understanding and interpreting of the message, and that knowledge and experience can alter the way it is understood (MSG, 2013). This model of communication is the one that fits best with the social media communication tools in the business world.

### 2.1.4 Elements of Communication

A more modern model for interpreting communication theory demonstrates the seven elements of communication. This has been created based on the earlier works of theorists such as Schramm. While this model is credited there is still no one agreed practical application for communication.

| Seven Elements of Communication | |
|---|---|
| **Source** | the person or thing that is sharing the message |
| **Message** | the information to be communicated and its meaning |
| **Encoding** | the message is assembled so that the audience can understand it |
| **Channel** | the path the message takes to the receiver |
| **Decoding** | the receiver interprets the message and forms an understanding |
| **Receiver** | the audience the message is delivered to, and includes the context of their preconceptions |
| **Feedback** | the reaction or responses from the receiver |

*Figure 1*

This model is also considered to be perpetual, with the feedback returning to the source, and the process repeating itself. This aligns with the earlier suggestions that the receiver's understanding and interpretations are crucial to the communication process, and that cultural elements can affect the understanding of the message (Gemma, 2013).

### 2.1.5 New Environment of Communication Theory

A change in the environments where communication can occur, along with the expansion of technology has implications for communication theory. Levels of available

information can impact the attention given to communications and real-time information can be found widely, as verbal, written and non-verbal. Digital developments have allowed computer-mediated communications to be rich and to carry context and convey emotions in ways similar to traditional face-to-face communications. In this environment feedback is fast and readily available (Luoma-aho, 2010).

An emerging theory around communication in the digital and social setting is that of Issue Arenas. This theory makes the implication that stakeholder interaction occurs outside of the control of the organizations that are being discussed. This means that contributing to the communication requires much less from the individual, and participation is accessible. To participate in the discourse the individual need only monitor, listen and discuss, rather than possess authority or control (Luoma-aho, 2010).

This relates to the subject of this paper, in that on the social platform of Twitter, stakeholder interaction is constant and uncontrollable. The consumer is able to interject at will, and engage with other consumers and other consumers' queries. The airline's messages can be viewed and discussed widely, and therefore the receiver's understanding of these is even more relevant.

## 2.2 Customer Satisfaction Theory

Customer satisfaction is a conceptual theory that has long been examined and states that keeping the customer satisfied with brand interactions is essential for all businesses long-term survival. Not only is customer satisfaction with a company's products or services often viewed as the key to long term success and competitiveness (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997), but this theory should be expanded to all customer interactions as well.

Viewing customer satisfaction in the theme of relationship marketing, customer satisfaction is considered central in customer retention (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997). This concept became even more important with the paradigm shift from transactional marketing to relationship marketing that has occurred over the last few decades in the field of marketing (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997). Kotler (1994) very simply stated that the key to customer retention is customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is primarily viewed as a concept that is dominated by emotions and related to the quality of the service or product received (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997). Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997) concludes that in understanding customer satisfaction and the significance, that the customer's level of involvement must be considered. This is of utmost relevance to this study, where the Twitter consumer is a highly involved individual, with the ability to connect with other consumers. A relationship with the brand is an expectation of this consumer, and the results of which can be viewed publicly on the Twitter platform. Considering this, relationship building

for customer satisfaction is an important factor to be considered on social media, and the public platform of this relationship can impact brand image and consumer perceptions.

Customer satisfaction can be viewed not only in terms of quality or customer retention, but also directly can be related to profitability, consumer attitudes, and consumer purchase behavior (Donio et al, 2006). Therefore, understanding the significance that customer satisfaction plays into the overall success and long term strategy of a brand is critical, while it is also important to be able to assess and measure customer satisfaction for each sector and brand.

## 2.3 Social Networks

Prior to analyzing individual platforms such as Twitter, it is important to understand social networks and their functions as a group. Social networking is described to be the coalition of technology that allows consumers to collaborate, communicate, co-create and share information online (Piskorski, 2011). Social networks combine individuals, groups or organizations that share mutual interests such as visions, ideas or values. Individuals utilize social networks to meet new people as well as strengthen existing relationships, a concept which is easily transferable to consumer and brand interactions on social media as well (Piskorski, 2011). Social networks have shaped the way consumers engage and interpret the value of brands. Brands are now attempting to capitalize on this by engaging and strategizing where value can be formed. The significance of social networks is the 'power of the masses'. These platforms allow

likeminded consumers to congregate and share ideas, building in size and consequently power. This 'power of the masses' on social networking sites has influenced a shift of power from brand to consumer. Brands are interested in the decision-makers influencing these social networks, who can be a significant ally for brand promotion (Mosadegh, 2011).

It is an accepted notion that social media and networks have shifted the power directly to individual consumers. The Web was generated to connect consumers in collaborative and engaged webs, and was not designed as a means of selling branded goods and services (Fournier, 2011). Web 2.0 is described as the infrastructure that had created and engaged consumer-generated content at a highly collective and social level. Consequently, Web 2.0 birthed the social media phenomenon (Berthon, 2012). Web 2.0 has had a significant impact on the way consumers utilize the Internet, and particularly how they interact with each other (King, 2014). The phenomenon of the social web, and the substantial growth of social media, has affected business practice in ways that are only beginning to be understood (Hennig-Thurau, 2013). In this new highly social environment, consumer power is much more substantial than before, opening doors to new behaviors. Importantly, social media allows consumers to manage relationships with brands, and for these relationships to be handled at the consumer's level (Hennig-Thurau, 2013). This shift in power over to the consumer means that value production has equally moved from brand to consumer (Berthon, 2012). This is an important element for this study, as the empowered consumer has expectations of the relationship

with the brand, and the brand must understand these expectations, and equally meet them in order to satisfy the social consumer.

Consumers contribute to value across various levels. This can begin on micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, where consumers can engage conversation around products and services. Further, consumers can create content in the form of text or video, reviewing, analyzing and discussing products and services. Consumer opinion can contribute to value, and consumer involvement can escalate to levels where the consumer is an influencer, becoming involved with the promotion and even modification of brands (Berthon, 2012). These influential virtual networks where consumers reside are driving the conversation, leaving brands with little control over the flow of conversation (Baird, 2011). Importantly, these conversations stretch far beyond a two-way relationship between consumer and brand, but instead extend to involve all further public conversation between consumers (Band, 2010). These highly social and public platforms can outweigh any marketing efforts from brands, with phenomenal reach and speed (Baird, 2011). Consumers have been empowered to generate their own content, and to contribute their own experiences. This is challenging for brands that must adapt to this newly empowered consumer, and find the appropriate tone and means of engagement on these highly public social platforms (Fournier, 2011).

The empowered consumer is now capable of spreading negative reviews and information about brands easily and quickly, with a far reaching arena. Brands recognize that engaging with this consumer power and social web is an imperative

element in sustaining competitive advantage (King, 2014). As consumers are inherently self-interested, brands must strategize how to co-exist with the shift in power to the consumer (Fournier, 2011).

### 2.4 Empowered Consumer

The shift in power directly to the consumer with the use of social media has created a scenario where the consumer is now a co-creator of the brand (Wind, 2008). The new empowered consumer requires customization, communities, multiple channels, competitive value, and choice (Wind, 2008). These are no longer just wants of the consumer, but a necessity in order for them to have brand loyalty. Consumers are no longer passive (Wind, 2008) in either the marketing process or the building of a brand.

The power of the consumer in this environment has many implications for brands. It is important for brands to accept this empowered consumer and create a platform that caters to it. Allowing the consumer to drive the interaction and aid in brand image is a strong way to create a stronger brand and loyalty. However, also requires the brand to be involved with these interactions. Consumer initiated interaction should be viewed as a top priority and requires constant and careful management. This interaction can be used to build the brand, but also has the power to hurt or belittle the brand if the company does not respond to this interaction correctly. The consumer has immense power in a very public forum which brands must learn to react to in a way in which is positive to the brand.

This leads to the research question that this paper is examining. Participating in this interaction is simply not enough, there is a need and a space for theory and practical implications of what type of interaction is required to keep the consumer satisfied. If responses and the interaction via social networking between brands and consumers is not viewed in a valuable way to the consumer, then the brand is losing the potential benefit and power that social media offers both brands and consumers.

## 2.5 Social Customer Relationship Management

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has typically been the approach brands have taken to attempt to understand and manage their consumers' behavior (Mosadegh, 2011). There are various definitions of CRM in the literature, an appropriate and clear one is; "CRM is a philosophy and a strategy supported by a system and a technology, designed to improve human interactions in a business environment" (Mosadegh, 2011). CRM can be divided into three areas: operational, analytical and collaborative. Operational CRM is all automated brand services that interact with the consumer, such as marketing automation, sales automation and customer services. Analytical CRM refers to the management of consumer database and information systems. Importantly for this study is collaborative CRM, which relates to all of the channels whereby the consumer can communicate with the brand. This includes traditional methods such as web sites and call centers, as well as the use of social media platforms such as blogs, video content, forums and micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Mosadegh, 2011). Collaborative CRM introduces social CRM, relating specifically to collaborative CRM across social media platforms. Social CRM engages the consumer in

collaborative conversations with the brand, with the consumer maintaining the power in this highly visible social setting. Due to the accessible setting social CRM is therefore highly transparent and an area of trust, as consumers believe brands are more likely to be honest when their responses are open to scrutiny by the general population. Meanwhile it is a business strategy that, whilst consumer driven, is mutually beneficial for both consumer and brand (Mosadegh, 2011). Social CRM is an effective relationship marketing instrument, and with the level of trust and transparency social CRM can be utilized to firstly, build close relationships with consumers, and secondly to enhance consumer perceptions of relationships (Smith, 1999).

Different companies take different approaches to this new element of CRM, some notably utilizing the power of social media more than others. Some companies have been noticed for specifically thriving in this area. One is the American based airline company, Southwest Airlines. This company uses the company Twitter account to update passengers on delays, issues, and promotions (Holmes, 2011). As the company has seen an increase of this platform as a "complaint line" and has 1.83 million followers, the company has set up a specific team to be engaged with the Twitter during the hours of operation (Holmes, 2011). Furthermore, the company also increases the number of individuals engaging with their Twitter consumers in the event of extended delays or unforeseen issues (Holmes, 2011). For Southwest, Twitter initially was assigned to the advertising department, but it was soon shifted to the public relations department when the company saw the power it gave consumers for direct interaction (Holmes, 2011). It is far easier for consumers to Tweet them directly for all kinds of

information, even something as simple and individual about lost baggage (Holmes, 2011). However, in order for this to be a positive interaction, Southwest has realized that consumers need and expect a quick reply directly from the company (Holmes, 2011).

This specifically relates to the subject of this study as it can be seen consumers are developing greater demands from brands across Twitter. As some brands are managing to capitalize to this new consumer demand, while others falter, it has to been seen where consumers find value in interactions with brands on Twitter, and what brands can do to support this.

### 2.6 Twitter

Customer service on Twitter is not unique to a few companies, it is now an expectation of consumers as an option to contact the brand directly. Micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter are potentially very useful as a customer relationship management tool, and are a platform where consumers have high expectations of customer service response (Coyle, 2012). Engaging with consumers on a platform such as Twitter, which has 500 million tweets sent per day and 288 million monthly active users requires heavy resources from a brand, but has potential payoff for CRM (Coyle, 2012; Simply Measured, 2015).

A study by Simply Measured, a leading social media analytics organization, has tracked customer service engagement on Twitter from 2014 to 2015. The study covered the 100

best global brands, as determined by Interbrand. 2014 was the first year where Interbrand included Twitter as an element of the ranking process.

The study found that, aside from being generally active on Twitter, 43% of the brands have customer service-devoted Twitter handles – meaning these brands have secondary Twitter accounts dedicated fully for customer service issues. This suggests that brands are recognizing Twitter as a platform beyond simple brand recognition, and instead as a CRM tool (Simply Measured, 2015). From 2014 to 2015 there was an increase of 19% of dedicated customer service handles in the top brands, however the number of top brands active on Twitter in general was stagnant. This emphasizes the move towards Twitter as a customer service platform and the realization from brands that Twitter is a viable platform for resolving consumer issues (Simply Measured, 2015).

Consumers are revealing the need for customer service on Twitter, with these customer service handles seeing increased mentions by 41% year over year in 2015 (Simply Measured, 2015). This dramatic rise in mentions shows not only consumer awareness of the Twitter handles, but also their relevance and demand. These figures support this study as clearly consumer expectations of brands on Twitter is increasing rapidly, and brands must understand where consumers find value, and how to respond to this.

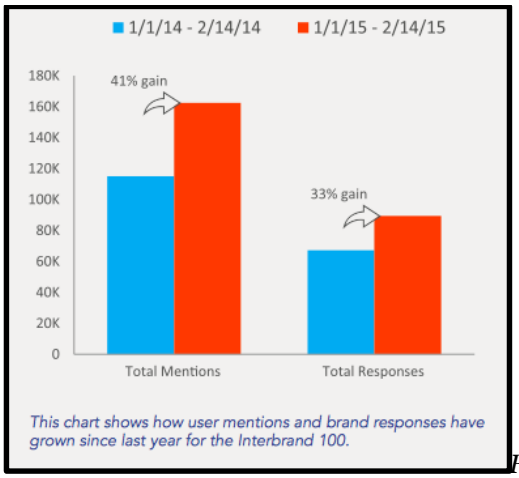



*Figure 2 (Simply Measured, 2015)*

Typically these customer service-devoted handles utilize online resources to resolve consumer issues immediately, and rarely direct consumers to Twitter's direct messaging service (Simply Measured, 2015). This suggests a level of transparency and trust, by maintaining conversation in the public setting. This level of transparency does not exist in customer service platforms outside of the social media setting, and therefore the customer service and brand management resources from more traditional settings cannot simply be replicated on Twitter.

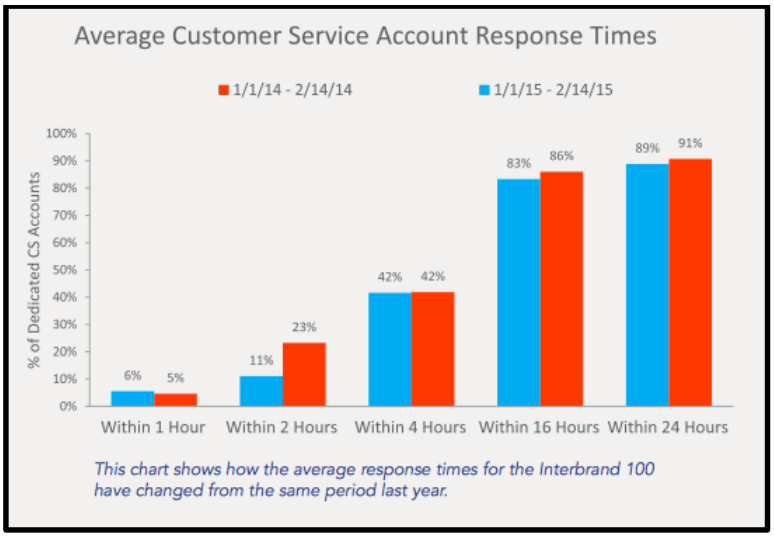



*Figure 3 (Simply Measured, 2015)*

These customer service-devoted Twitter handles are reacting to consumer expectations of fast response, with 63% having a response time of less than 8 hours – a 10% improvement on the previous year. Additionally, 91% of the customer service accounts respond to consumers within 24 hours (when they do respond). This shows that many brands have an understanding that consumers look to Twitter for fast response. Alternatively there are brands that display exceptional timeliness in response, with 5% of brands in the study responding to consumers within one hour. This 5% more likely matches with consumers' expectations and desires of conversations via Twitter. While the level of customer service conversation has increased largely on the previous year, response times remain largely unchanged (Simply Measured, 2015).

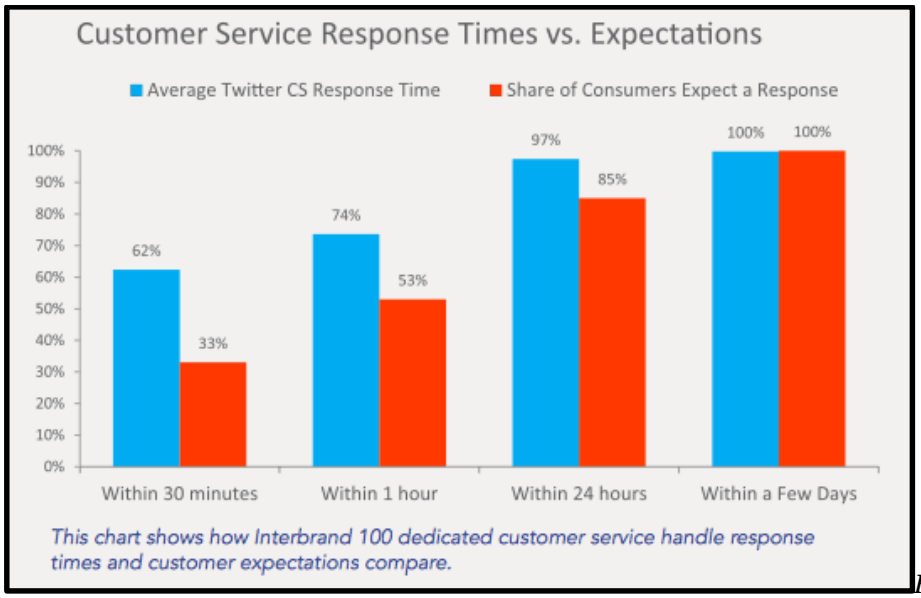



*Figure 4*

(Simply Measured, 2015)

The study also revealed that on Twitter, 86% of consumers expect brands to respond to their Tweets within a 24-hour period, while 53% of consumers expect the response within one hour. With only 5% actually responding within the one-hour period these

results are not meeting consumer expectations (Simply Measured, 2015). These figures show that overall brands are failing to meet consumers' expectations in terms of immediacy of response.

The Twitter expectations are a direct result of consumers' demands and expectations. Therefore, brands need to focus on a way to be successful on Twitter and meet these expectations. Consumer engagement itself has been studied and measured in many ways in terms of how to motivate consumers to engage (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2012). In terms of Twitter, the trends show that consumers are engaging and it is not simply enough for brands to worry about motivating consumers to engage, it is more a question now of what to do when the consumer directly engages in a public forum such as Twitter.

Furthermore, many, if not most companies these days attempt to utilize Twitter as a marketing tool as well as a way to enhance the brand and brand loyalty. However, it is not enough to simply transfer a digital strategy into the social environment such as Twitter (Piskorski, 2011). Instead, brands must specifically create a strategy when using any social media platform and these strategies also should vary among the various platforms. These strategies should come from the knowledge and basis that individuals use social media to connect to other people (Piskorski, 2011). Companies are able to enter this social space if they maintain the same concept, creating a scenario where individual consumers are able to connect directly with the brand in a one on one

interaction. Without this individualized strategy, brands will find that their social media platforms are not what the intended consumer is wanting.

## 2.7 Airline Industry

The airline industry itself is a unique cluster of brands for many reasons; not only is it a highly competitive industry, but it also is subject to economic downturns as it is often viewed as a luxury product (Kee Mun and Ghazali, 2011). The world airline market has seen large financial losses over the last few years due to economy, fuel pricing, political unrest, and other reasons (Kee Mun and Ghazali, 2011). This coupled with the trend of low cost airlines has increased the competition in the airline industry and reinforced the importance of brand management in this sector (Kee Mun and Ghazali, 2011).

There are currently many low cost and discount airlines globally that further the competition in this market. While many consumers may be price sensitive, consumer satisfaction is also a large predictor in return business and brand loyalty (Chen and Hu, 2013). Many studies have been conducted to specifically examine airline industries. One particular study showed that overall legacy or full service (non-discount) airlines had a higher rate of consumer satisfaction (Gures et al, 2014). This study is a valuable look into the mind of an airline consumer, while the price point may be important, it is not everything. Also noted in this study is that the actual quality of engagement with the brand while traveling was more important that the price point for the consumer (Gures et al, 2014). Specifically, consumers in this study responded well to high quality of

service employees attitudes while using the airline services (Gures et al, 2014). While this particular study looked at in-person interactions with the brands, it should also be directly applied to the digital world as well. Consumer interaction of all types should be viewed as a valuable way to increase consumer satisfaction, this concept can be, and should be, directly related to a company's Twitter account. Knowing that in a highly competitive market that consumer satisfaction can be a predictor of future purchase decisions should show the importance of all brand interactions, especially real time Twitter consumer interactions. Service quality, specifically in the airline industry has been shown to directly impact consumer brand loyalty. This is not surprising, but with the ability to reach consumers digitally, it offers another point of service which the airline industry can connect with and build consumer loyalty (Chen, Hu, 2013).

### 2.8 Chapter Summary

Communication theory understands that the cultures, knowledge and understanding of the receiver play a crucial role in his interpretation of the message. When this is amplified to a public forum such as Twitter, it is of utmost important that messages support positive consumer relationships and the brand image. In the digital age any individual can be involved in the communication, and control of the discourse has shifted to the consumer, and away from the brand.

It is understood that customer satisfaction can be linked to the consumer's relationship with the brand. Customer satisfaction theory finds that now, not only does the consumer have to be satisfied with the product or service, but all interaction with the brand can

impact the consumer's level of satisfaction. This includes interactions in person, as well as on social media platforms such as Twitter.

Social networks combine individuals, groups, and organizations that share mutual interests, ideas, or values. The initial intent of social networks was to make new connections and strengthen existing relationships, a concept that easily translates into brand and consumer relationships as well. Social networks have shifted the power to the individual consumer and empowered consumers in a highly public social forum.

Social networks led to the creation of a highly empowered consumer. This empowered consumer is no longer passive and must be viewed as a co-creator of the brand. Due to this, consumer initiated interaction with brands should be viewed as a top priority for brands to utilize in order to keep these interactions beneficial. This requires constant and careful management from brands with the consumer having this immense power in a public forum. There is space for theory and consideration of practical implications of these interactions initiated by the consumer to the brand and ensuring that the consumer remains satisfied.

Social customer relationship management is a theory that is derived from customer relationship management (CRM) theory and adapted to include the social media that is used by today's consumer. CRM is the approach that brands have taken to attempt to understand and manage consumers' behavior and includes three categories; operational, analytical, and collaborative. In the collaborative category of CRM, it has a focus on the different channels in which a consumer can communicate with a brand.

Social CRM fits into this category with social media giving consumers a highly transparent and public communication channel to the brand.

Twitter is a unique social media platform in that the interactions have a character limit of 140 characters, which is not true of any other social media platform. Twitter is not unique to a few brands, but is now viewed as an expectation of consumers as a way to directly interact and access the brand. As this is a direct consumer expectation, brands need to focus on a strategy to be successful on Twitter and meet the expectations of consumers. Twitter should not only be used by brands for marketing purposes, but also must be used to connect directly with the consumer or offer a place for the consumer to directly interact with the brand.

The airline industry is a highly competitive industry that also is sensitive to economic downturns, making it a unique sector of brands. Competition continues to increase with the trend of low cost airlines around the world. While airline consumers are known to be price sensitive, it consumer satisfaction is also important to brand loyalty in these consumers. This is an indicator of how important all consumer interactions are, including digital interactions.

Social networks, specifically Twitter, are an important factor in consumer satisfaction in their interaction with the brands. This portion of social customer relationship management is the basis for this thesis and research as this paper attempts to identify specific factors in increase consumer satisfaction, while focusing on how this relates to the theory of social CRM and improvements brands in the airline sector can make.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1 Object of Study

There are many different ways to approach this specific thesis question and to look at this data that is collected. First, the object of study must be identified in order to ensure that the focus of the research is accurate. The object of study is the perceived value, from the consumer standpoint, of brand responses via Twitter in the airline industry. This can be simplified to calling the object of study consumer emotions.

### 3.1.1 Required Data

In order to complete this research study data was required concerning consumer interactions with brands on Twitter. Consumer-brand conversations were collected and analyzed in order to recognize where value can be found in these conversations, and how it can be measured. Further to this, data relating to consumers' attitudes was also analyzed to gain an understanding of how consumers' say they would like brands to interact on Twitter, and where they perceive value. This empirical material was collected via netnography on Twitter as well as a self-completion web survey to further evaluate the object of study.

### 3.1.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Before data collection could begin the ontology, or philosophical assumptions of nature and reality (Easterby-Smith et al, 2010) had to be defined. The ontology of relativism

states that scientific laws exist, but are created by people (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012). This means that facts depend on the viewpoint of the user, and the assumption is made that each individual's life experience will influence their individual viewpoint (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012). While it is outside the scope of this research to know each individual personally, this is a very relevant assumption that must be accepted. As this paper considers consumer emotional responses to brand responses, relativism has been selected as the appropriate ontology.

Epistemology is defined as a general set of assumptions and inquiry (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012). Easterby-Smith et al (2012) specifically speak of two types of theories, positivism and social constructionism. Where positivism allows for a social world existing externally with properties measured by an independent observer and identifying causal explanations; social constructivism allows for a reality that is given meaning by people themselves (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012, p. 65). Based on the research objectives of this particular study, neither theory by itself is a true fit for the intended outcome. However, Easterby-Smith et al (2012) also introduce a mixed epistemological theory that combines the two, called critical realism.

Critical realism offers the best of both of the theories that Easterby-Smith et al (2012) introduce and therefore will be the chosen epistemology for this research paper. Critical realism not only examines the empirical domain, but also allows for the potential of causality to exist. As this research study is looking at consumer emotions, it must be accepted that each individual's "truth" will vary based on their own personal experiences

and allow for the concept that reality is given meaning by the individuals themselves, while at the same time, the research must be able to examine emotions in an objective manner.

### 3.1.3 Mixed Method Study

This study consists of both qualitative and a quantitative components in order to strengthen the overall data and conclusions. As the data collected was used in the creation of a model, this mixed method of quantitative and qualitative components lead to a greater understanding and more comprehensive data for the creation of the model. We recognize that there is a potential for conflict when using a mixed model theory for method (Easterby-Smith et al 2012). Mainly, the concern is that the two separate methods will not connect into a solid data set, but remain separated. However, the questions that were asked via the web survey were used to supplement the primary data from the netnography study. The quantitative portion of the study was used as supporting data, and therefore the qualitative section takes priority. This priority being established prior to data collection minimizes the potential issues in using a mixed method approach (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012).

#### 3.1.3.1 Qualitative Portion

As the concern of the study is primarily consumer attitudes, the research is largely a qualitative study. For the netnography data, a qualitative study is the relevant choice as it concerns behaviors and feelings. Qualitative research was necessary for this research

study, and it encompasses several benefits. Primarily qualitative research is beneficial in that it avoids prior judgement, which in turn can uncover unexpected elements and areas of study. Equally, qualitative data is the effective means of gathering feelings, thoughts and understanding human interactions - all concerns of this study.

#### 3.1.3.2 Quantitative Portion

As self-completion web surveys were also distributed as complementary data to the netnography data observed, there was also a quantitative component to this study. The web-based survey yielded numerical results based on the Likert Scale for easier analysis purposes. This quantitative analysis of these surveys produced a generalized viewpoint of consumer emotions within the airline industry as well as general statistics of consumer usage on Twitter. It is most appropriate to have this component of quantitative research in order for analysis purposes.

## 3.2 Data Collection

### 3.2.1 Netnography

To collect the qualitative data, firstly, a netnography study was implemented. A netnography study is a method of market research that is interested in 'computer mediated conversations' (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A netnography study was chosen because, as the study regards consumer attitudes to brand behavior online, the Internet is the most appropriate area of research. The netnography study collected 600 conversations between consumers and airline brands on Twitter and these were saved as

screenshots and then transcribed, see Appendix A (p. i). The study considered the conversations of six airlines; EasyJet, Ryanair, British Airways, SouthWest Airlines, JetBlue, and American Airlines. These six airlines have been chosen to represent a wide range of airlines and airline consumers. A mix of American airlines and British airlines were selected so that the main language of conversation would be in English, and a combination of budget and legacy airlines were selected from these countries to represent a spread of consumers, expectations and tones. Conversations were collected from direct tweets to the airline's own Twitter handles. All manner of conversations were collected so long as the airline responded to the consumer, and the consumer made a further response – e.g. there must be at least three tweets in the conversation. The netnography study was carried out as a 'simple observation' study and therefore the data was collected without intrusion to those parties involved, and without the knowledge from the brands and consumers that they were being observed (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The netnography study is beneficial for this research study because the data received through a simple observation netnography study is authentic, unforced and raw (Kozinets, 2010). Consumer behavior on the social media platforms can be spontaneous and emotional, and therefore this authentic and true emotion is the most honest and relevant for the study. Data gathered is a true reflection of consumer and brand behavior online – as opposed to how consumers and brands would like to say they behave. Another benefit of a netnography study, specifically on Twitter is that, not only is netnography concerned with the dialogue, but it also refers to symbols, imagery and context (Kozinets, 2010). Twitter is unique in its context as it has a character limit

on tweets of only 140 characters. This means conversation flows differently to how it would, firstly in person, and secondly, on any other social media platform. Conversations are much more direct and straight to the point. Further, with this limited character count consumers can utilize 'emojis' to display emotion and make the tone of the conversation more clear. The use of these emojis is relevant to the netnography study to gain an understanding of tone, appreciation and perceived value. Many of the benefits that can be found in an ethnographic study also relate to the netnography study, as they are both a natural and authentic means of generating data. A netnography study, when carried out thoroughly and with detail, can be highly revealing of "consumer behaviors, opinions, tastes, impressions and interactions. Like a face-to-face ethnography, netnography provides a window into the realities of consumer groups as they go about their lives" (Kozients, 2010). Finally, whilst a netnography study carries the limitation of being a time consuming and extensive means of data collection, it has the fundamental benefit of data being easily accessible, unobtrusive and simple to collect (Kozinets, 2010).

### 3.2.2 Self-Completion Web Survey

In addition to the netnography study, a self-completion web survey was also conducted, see appendix (p.ix) for complete survey questions. The web survey was designed to gain an understanding of where consumers perceive value in conversation with brands on Twitter. Online consumers were asked to fill out the survey, which would establish if they engage with airline brands on Twitter, what expectations they have of brand response, and the degree to which they would value a response.

The web survey was hosted on SurveyMonkey and participants were invited to engage with the survey via invites across Facebook and Twitter. These invites were sent via Facebook, Twitter profiles and also through hash tag links on Twitter. Specific focus was given to sharing on airline Twitter handles and including airline hashtags in the links, with the hopes of targeting consumers who both used Twitter and airlines. Hosting via SurveyMonkey allows the data to be collected according to specific figures and themes, and therefore eases data analysis. Equally, sharing the web survey via social media platforms allows it to be recognized by a vast amount of consumers extremely quickly.

In order to optimize the response rate, the survey was designed to be simple and quick to complete and anonymity was stressed to give respondents comfort in their answers (Easterby-Smith, 2012). A limitation of the web survey is the fact that, as with any web survey, ability to control the sample is restricted (Bryman and Bell, 2011). To aid this limitation, the platforms where the web survey was shared were selected specifically because of their association with the most relevant sample. The study is concerned primarily with Twitter users who travel, and therefore sharing the web survey on platforms where these online consumers reside, such as Twitter and Facebook, ensured the most relevant responses are gathered. While this means the sample is not concurrent with the overall population (Easterby-Smith, 2012) this is not a limitation for this survey, as the overall population is not the concern. Access to Twitter users is accessible and the most relevant sample in terms of valuable results.

A potential drawback of a web survey is that it is not uncommon for there to be a limited response rate, this is especially likely if respondents fail to recognize value in the survey or do not take it seriously (Easterby-Smith, 2012). To respond to this, the web survey had to explain its value and potential value to the respondents, such as its potential to improve the way brands engage with consumers on Twitter. Equally, to gain a significant amount of responses the web survey was shared extensively on the relevant platforms, multiple times, to encourage participation. The researchers had defined a certain time period of one week in order to collect this survey data. While this time constraint limits the amount of responses possible, the survey data will still allow the researchers to get a generalized overview of the questions being asked. The main limitation of the web survey is the issue of the 'social desirability effect'. This is where consumers will potentially respond in the manner that they think the researcher wants to hear, rather than a true reflection of their behavior (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In order to minimize the potential of this effect, the questions were written in a way in which cannot sway the respondent one way or another. Further, the survey was introduced as a way to examine Twitter and airlines, without giving much detail to the respondents.

## 3.3 Data Analysis

### 3.3.1 Analysis

The 600 Twitter conversations that were gathered through the netnography study were analyzed through an approach that was inspired by the idea of grounded theory. A grounded analysis requires the intuition and tacit knowledge of the research to arrange and interpret the data (Easterby-Smith, 2012). As the data is gathered it is allowed to

speak for itself and themes can become clear – from this the data can be organized accordingly. Conclusions can be drawn from the data itself, rather than being used to align with presupposed ideas (Easterby-Smith, 2012). For this to be accurate analysis and coding begins at the very beginning of data collection. Critical analysis and thinking from the beginning of the project allows nothing to be missed (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Allowing the data to speak for itself, rather than aligning it with preconceived notions allows for unexpected trends and themes and therefore has a greater potential benefit. This requires the researcher to understand his/her own personal biases and assumptions, and be aware of when these are clouding an understanding of data interpretation. By freeing the study of these potential hindrances a greater knowledge can be created.

### 3.3.2 Background on Coding

Coding data is a process in which there are many different theories and guidelines in which can be used to code data. The way in which data is coded can change how the data is interpreted and therefore it is important for a researcher to choose a coding method that is most appropriate to receiving the results that are intended, this is even more important in qualitative data in which there is room for interpretation (Saldana, 2009).

Saldana (2009) defines a code in a qualitative setting as a word or phrase that symbolically assigns evocative attribute for the language based data. Saldana (2009) further states that this code is used to represent or capture the content and essence of

the data that is being examined. While Saldana (2009) offers many different ways in which coding of qualitative data can be achieved, one specific way is that of codes to categories. In this instance, data is coded and then categorized depending on the code (Saldana, 2009). This method is similar, yet distinct of the method of coding for patterns. Both of these systems allow for the researcher to systematically code the data in a way in which it will show patterns and categories that can then be analyzed. Saldana (2009) also highlights the benefits of coding as a team and recommends that if an individual researcher is coding that speaking with colleagues is critical to the process. This was achieved in this research paper as all coding was done with both authors present.

When coding in qualitative data, the method that the researcher chooses does impact the data in that the interpretation of each researcher may be different. There are also many coding computer programs which can be utilized for large or complex data sets, however, coding by hand can offer a much more detail oriented and personal approach to the research (Saldana, 2009). Regardless if the data is coded by hand or by a computer, it is important that the code that is chosen fits three distinct criteria as explained by Miles and Huberman (1994). Codes in qualitative analysis must be valid; reflect what is being researched, mutually exclusive; codes need to be distinct and not overlap each other, and finally, codes must be exhaustive; all data should fit into a code (Miles and Huberman, 1994). These guides ensure that once the data is coded in a qualitative inquiry that the researchers are able to utilize the coded data in order to find results and draw conclusions.

Miles and Huberman (1994) introduce the theory that coding qualitative data involves a three step procedure. First, data should be reduced to relevant data. This means that data is coded and organized based on what the researcher feels is relevant to the area of study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). It is important to note that while this step is used to determine relevant data from irrelevant data, all data should still be kept for future review if needed (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Step two is to display the data, such as in tables, charts, or other graphical and visual representations of the data. The third and final step is that of drawing conclusions. This three step process is to be used as a general guideline in coding qualitative data.

### 3.3.3 Coding in Practice

To analyze the data a coding system was implemented. To develop this coding system a close analysis of the data was employed. Coding was employed manually in order to pick up the details of each conversation and team coding was utilized. This meant an in-depth discussion between the researchers, as suggested by Saldana, 2009, in order to ensure coherence and clear understanding of the coding system. Equally, data was reviewed as it was collected, in order for the data to speak for itself and the code to be developed (Saldana, 2009).

Initially, an open coding system was implemented. Here the 600 conversations were carefully read, and each individual tweet was assigned a code. These codes emerged from the data, and were, as discussed by Miles and Huberman (1994), considered for

their validity to the project, their mutual exclusivity and whether the codes allowed for all data to be categorized.

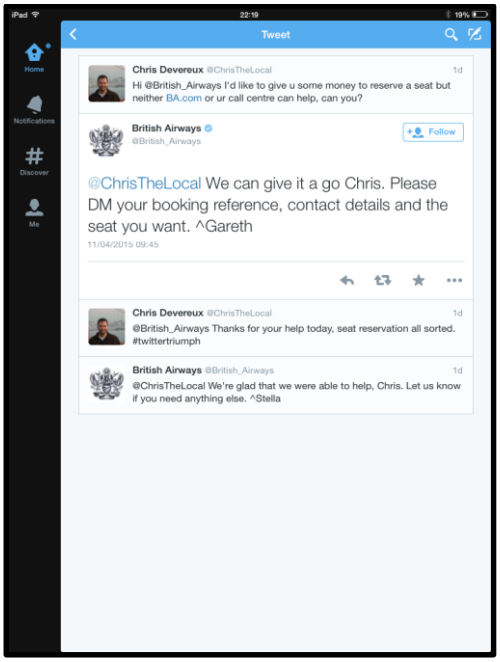



*Figure 5*

(*Example of a consumer initiated conversation screenshot with British Airways*)

Each interaction that was observed was first documented digitally with screen shots (as shown above), meaning all data would be available for further review if needed, and was secondly transcribed for ease of analysis. Through this open coding system 16 different categories were identified and further developed in line with the coding suggestions of Chowdury (2009) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). These 16 categories were divided over the three conversation components – consumer initiation, airline response and outcome. This allowed five consumer initiation options, eight airline response and three possible outcomes. The 16 coding options are explained in figure 6.

| Consumer Coding Categories | |
|---|---|
| **Sentiment Negative/Positive** | The expression of opinion concerning a brand, including company, product, or service. The sentiment is either positive or negative. |
| **Information seeking** | The expression of a desire to address some gap in data, information, or knowledge concerning some brand, including company, product or service. |
| **Information providing** | Providing data, information, or knowledge concerning some part of the brand – including company, product, or service. |
| **Comment** | The use of a brand, including company, product, or service, in a Tweet where the brand was not the primary focus. |
| **Airline Coding Categories** | |
| **Handling Questions** | Basic question/answer situation, airline answers direct question(s) initiated from consumer |
| **Casual conversations** | No point conversations, chit chat, conversations with consumers that are causal and nonbusiness in nature. |
| **Forwarding Link** | Sending customer to another web link for assistance, link can be internal or external, situations where questions are unable to be answered via the Tweet conversation |
| **Forwarding Contact** | Sending customer to another contact, phone number, email, customer service representative (excludes web links) for assistance, situations where questions are unable to be answered via the Tweet conversation |
| **Direct Messaging** | Requesting by the airline to the consumer to continue the conversation via direct messenger on Twitter, requesting private conversation with consumer |
| **Recommendations** | Recommending future services that the brand offers to consumer |
| **Confirmation** | Simple yes responses, when the customer already knows the answer but wants reassurance - customer will provide the answer in the question, also applies to situations where the airline offers no assistance to the consumer conversation, airline only offers a simple apology |
| **Request** | Asking for further information in order to answer the question from the consumer |
| **Outcome Coding Categories** | |
| **Positive** | Includes words: thank you, great, good, appreciate, smiley faces, happy emoticons |
| **Negative** | When consumer explicitly says the conversation was no help, negative opinions of the brand by the consumer, angry emojis |
| **Inconclusive** | No resolution, unclear whether the customer is satisfied or consumer simply stops communicating |

*Figure 6*

The outcome codes are from the perspective of the consumer, and relate to the consumers final response to the airline. It was often clear whether the consumer was satisfied with the engagement or if they were disappointed. When it was unclear how the consumer had perceived the engagement this was categorised as inconclusive. Once all conversations had been transcribed and coded, the data was arranged to align themes and patterns throughout. Eleven different arrangements of analysis were utilized:

| **Arrangements for Analysis** | |
|---|---|
| **Category** | **Description** |
| **Basic Calculations** | Each of the 16 codes was counted to reveal how many times they featured for the individual airlines. This allowed for a basic comparison qualities, such as the airlines response or positive outcomes. |
| **Positive Sentiment Ending Positively** | All tweets that had been initiated with a positive sentiment by the consumer, and which subsequently ended with a positive outcome were calculated – and the airline's action in between was measured. |
| **Positive Sentiment Ending Negatively** | All tweets that had been initiated with a positive sentiment by the consumer, and which subsequently ended with a negative outcome were calculated – and the airline's action in between was measured. |
| **Negative Sentiment Ending Positively** | All tweets that had been initiated with a negative sentiment by the consumer, and which subsequently ended with a positive outcome were calculated – and the airline's action in between was measured. |
| **Negative Sentiment Ending Negatively** | All tweets that had been initiated with a negative sentiment by the consumer, and which subsequently ended with a negative outcome were calculated – and the airline's action in between was measured. |
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Information Seeking Ending Positively** | All tweets that had been initiated by the consumer as information seeking, and which subsequently ended with a positive outcome were calculated – and the airline's action in between was measured. |
| **Information Seeking Ending Negatively** | All tweets that had been initiated by the consumer as information seeking, and which subsequently ended with a negative outcome were calculated – and the airline's action in between was measured. |
| **Information Providing Ending Positively** | All tweets that had been initiated by the consumer as information providing, and which subsequently ended with a positive outcome were calculated – and the airline's action in between was measured. |
| **Information Providing Ending Negatively** | All tweets that had been initiated by the consumer as information providing, and which subsequently ended with a negative outcome were calculated – and the airline's action in between was measured. |
| **Positive Outcomes** | All tweets that ended with a positive outcome from the consumer's point of view were calculated, and the airlines response leading to this conclusion was measured. |
| **Negative Outcomes** | All tweets that ended with a negative outcome from the consumer's point of view were calculated, and the airlines response leading to this conclusion was measured. |

*Figure 7*

These arrangements were utilized to reveal patterns such as qualities that lead to a positive outcome, and revealed what consumers' preferences were in their engagement with the airline.

It should be noted that all tweets that were categorised under the consumer category 'comment' were not further analyzed as these tweets were rare and were not seeking engagement from the airline – therefore not applying to this study.

### 3.3.4 Benefits and Limitations of Coding

As discussed, this method of data collection is open to interpretation because of its open-nature. Without the benefit of computer-aided content analysis systems, coding vast amounts of qualitative data is a rigorous task (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Equally, the subjective nature of the analysis allows for researcher bias and understanding to play a part in the understanding of the data (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Awareness of this was maintained throughout the process. In spite of these limitations, coding grounded analysis was the appropriate choice for the research study because of its transparent nature. With qualitative research being under scrutiny for being subjective, a coded grounded analysis allows for high levels of transparency throughout the entire process, emphasizing its reliability (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Performing the coded grounded analysis specifically on Twitter conversations played a significant benefit in that it "overcomes the tendency of individuals to deny socially undesirable traits and only admit to socially desirable ones" (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This specifically relates to the idea that consumers may behave differently online that they would suggest they do. It is possible that, if asked in person, consumers would suggest different results than can be obtained through the coding of the grounded

analysis. Therefore this process gained the most honest and reliable data, which could not be received otherwise.

## 3.4 Validity and Ethical Considerations

### 3.4.1 Validity

High levels of transparency through clarity and specificity also aid in any criticism of subjectivity regards the qualitative study. Qualitative data analysis is a subjective process surrounding behaviors and feelings and therefore the interpretation of the specific researcher plays a role in its understanding – consequently researchers' tactic knowledge is relevant. Through transparency of the analysis process the research paper can be understood and valued. This transparency will allow for readers of this research to have faith and trust in the data and will also allow for this research question to be reproduced with the same results.

### 3.4.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethics within data collection is a subject within which there is no clear consensus as to what is morally acceptable and what is not. Different publicized beliefs and conflicts by authors leave this as a grey area (Bryman and Bell, 2011). It is suggested in the literature that and overall and acceptable approach to ethics would be that the researcher should at no point bring harm to any of the bodies included in the study (Easterby-Smith, 2012). This suggests that anonymity is imperative so that the study cannot affect the lives of those involved. It is also suggested that research participants should provide

fully formed consent (Easterby-Smith, 2012). While this would be ethical practice in more obtrusive and involved studies, in the case of a simple observation netnography study it is not appropriate, and consumer behavior could be altered if consent was requested – consumers may not always be proud of their behavior online. Also, with the public manner of Twitter it is assumed that consumers understand that their data, unless adjusted in their individual privacy settings, is accessible. Considering this, anonymity will be of the highest concern to protect any individuals involved.

## 3.5 Chapter Summary

A method that was a combination of qualitative and quantitative was devised in order to discover consumer expectations of airlines on Twitter and how airlines should respond to these. Firstly 600 consumer-brand conversations were collected across six airline's Twitter accounts (EasyJet, Ryanair, British Airways, SouthWest Airlines, JetBlue, and American Airlines), and were analyzed as part of a netnography study. A coding system was developed to categorize the conversations, and to recognise the areas where consumers found value, and equally where they were unsatisfied with the interaction. The coding system found four consumer categories, and considered all manner of airline response to these engagements, with a focus on positive or negative outcomes. The findings of the netnography study supported the creation of a survey, which was then used to measure consumer values of airline brands on Twitter.

# 4. Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

Data was collected from the six airlines as outlined in the Methodology section. These six airlines were chosen in order to analyze a wide range of airlines in English speaking countries, see figure 8 for basic demographics on each airline. Each airline had 100 qualifying conversations recorded and classified over the period of one week for a total of 600 separate Twitter conversations to analyze.

### 4.1.1 Airline Brand Specific Information

Every brand has a unique strategy for their brand and social media accounts. Airlines not only differ dramatically in business models, but also differ greatly in how they utilize and how consumers use their Twitter feed. Each airline was researched in order to get a better understanding and background of the brand, to further aid in comparing the data. The basic information and factors of each airline is shown in figure 8 and more detailed information can be found in Appendix F (p. xii).

Table: Airline Highlights

| Airline | EasyJet | RyanAir | British Airways | American | JetBlue | SouthWest |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Date Twitter Est. | May 2009 | Sept 2013 | Dec 2008 | April 2009 | July 2007 | July 2007 |
| Twitter Followers | 275K | 142K | 650K | 1 million | 1.9 million | 1.8 million |
| Number of Consumers Airline is following | 7,382 | 203k | 33K | 56.3k | 108K | 22K |
| # Tweets | 82.3K | 39.5K | 255K | 860K | 268K | 66K |

*Figure 8*

### 4.1.2 Coding

As laid out in Methodology, chapter 3, a total of 600 Twitter conversations were collected across six different airlines. These conversations were all consumer initiated and consisted of at least three tweets (Consumer – Airline – Consumer). Using the coding system shown in figure 6 in the Methodology section in Chapter 3, these conversations were deconstructed and analyzed. Each of the 600 conversations was coded individually by hand in order to insure the accuracy of the coding system. See Appendix B (p. ii) for detailed coded data for each conversation.

Data was analyzed and classified in 11 different categories or arrangements in order to examine as many different scenarios and data sets as possible, these eleven arrangements are laid out in detail in figure 7 in the methodology chapter. Each category is listed below and states the raw data findings for each section. See Appendix C for all detailed data charts that were completed. These data charts were then used to discover data trends and outliers in order to create results.

### 4.1.3 Survey

The consumer survey was completed via SurveyMonkey as stated in the Method Section. A total of 72 responses were collected over the week that the survey was open and active, for complete list of questions see Appendix D (p. ix). Full data collected from this survey can be seen in Appendix E (p. xi). Of the responses that were received, the respondents that answered agree or strongly agree that they would tweet an airline either a question,

compliant, or compliment were isolated and the data was analyzed separately from the total population of respondents.

## 4.2 Twitter Data by Arrangement

### 4.2.1 Basic Calculations

Basic data outcomes were counted and collected in order to label and prioritize the data to see trends. Each code was isolated individually and also by airline, allowing for comparisons between airlines as applicable.

Of all of the conversations collected and coded, 46.8% of the conversations contained an information seeking component and 29.8% involved negative sentiment. This shows the main way in which consumers' utilize the airline Twitter accounts are to gain information or to complain.

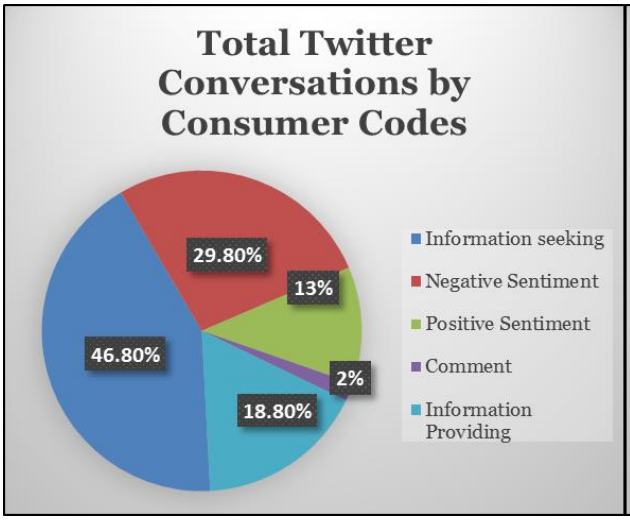



*Figure 9*

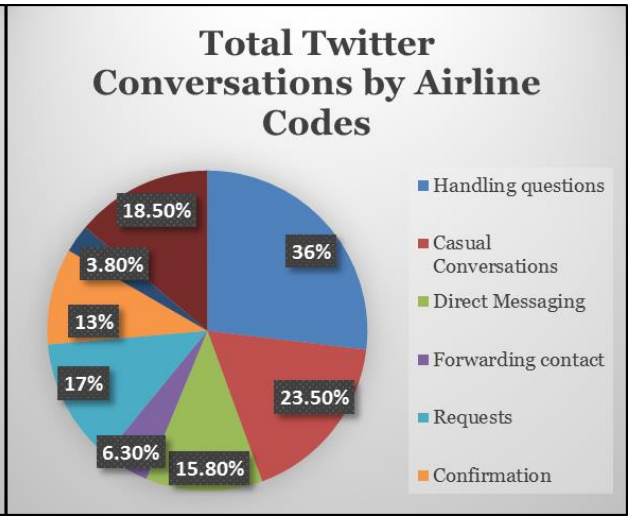



*Figure 10*

Only 2% of the conversations involved a comment component. This code was intended to capture conversations where the brand was not the focus, but mentioned. Due to the low amount, this data code did not offer insights into this research.

The fact that 13% of the conversations involved positive sentiment versus 29.8% of conversations having a negative sentiment component shows that consumers are far more likely to tweet the brand when they are unsatisfied rather than when they are satisfied, meaning the airline has a direct connection to unsatisfied consumers.

Out of 600 conversations, 36% of the questions had an airline response of handing questions (see figure 10), which coincides with the previous data of consumers seeking information. Casual conversations occurred in 23.5% of the conversations. Direct messaging requests occurred in 15.8% of conversations. Also, airlines used forwarding link and forwarding contact in 24.8% of the conversations.

Requests for further information occurred in 17% of conversations, which directly shows that the airlines were engaged to request additional information to answer the consumers' questions sufficiently. Airlines used confirmation in 13% of the conversations. This is a rather high number of instances where the airline responded, but did not offer anything of value.

### 4.2.2 Positive Sentiment Ending Positively

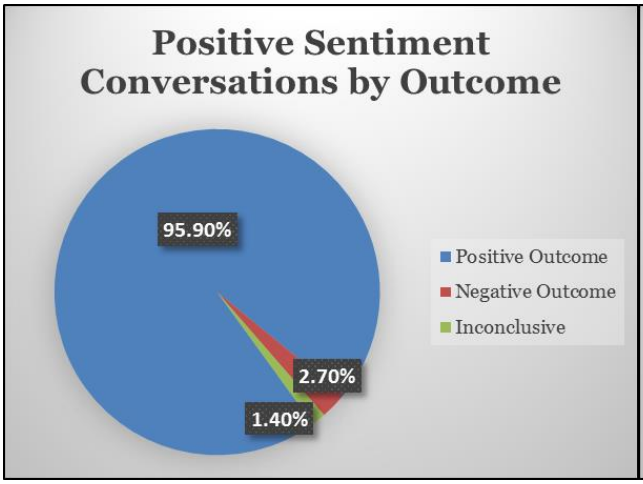



*Figure 11*

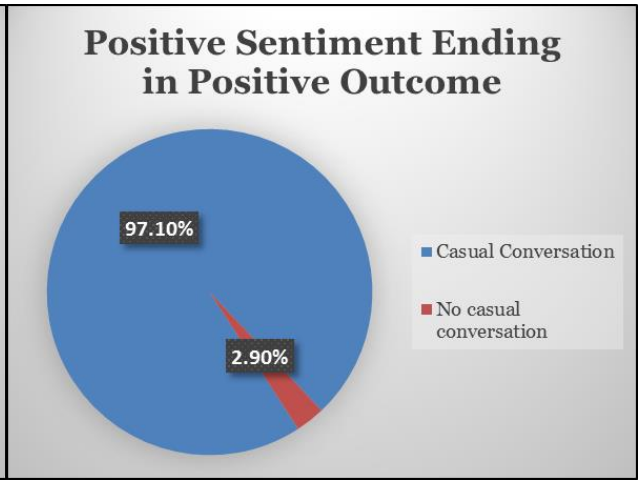



*Figure 12*

This arrangement is all the tweets that had been initiated with a positive sentiment from the consumer and ended with a positive outcome. As to be expected, 95.9% of the conversations that are initiated with positive sentiment from the consumer stay positive as shown in figure 11.

Furthermore, 97.1% of the conversations that stay positive in this category involve a casual conversation component (see figure 12), showing consumers value direct engagement with the brand. Another highlight of this data is that there are no recommendation code in this arrangement.

### 4.2.3 Positive Sentiment Ending Negatively

All tweets that had been initiated with a positive sentiment by the consumer, and which subsequently ended with a negative outcome were calculated – and the airline's action

measured. Of all of the conversations that began with consumer initiated positive sentiment, only 2.7% had a negative outcome.

### 4.2.4 Negative Sentiment Ending Positively

This category includes all tweets that had been initiated with a negative sentiment by the consumer, and which subsequently ended with a positive outcome were calculated by airline response. Of these conversations, only 22% of the conversations ended with a positive outcome. This is a substantially low number showing a very large opportunity area for airlines.

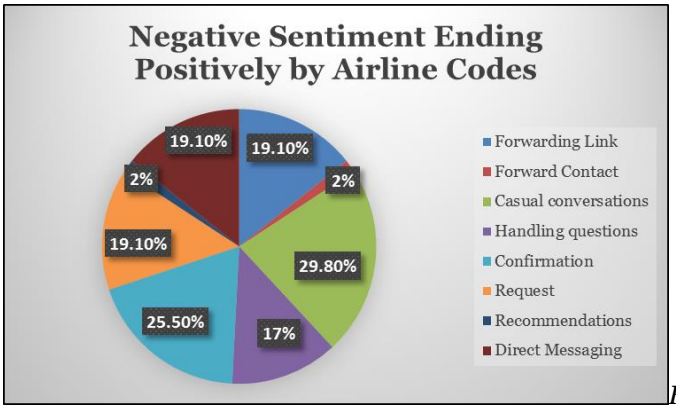



*Figure 13*

Of these conversations, 29.8% had a causal conversation component (seen in figure 13). This suggests the value of the brand engagement with the consumer. A total of 19.1% of the positive outcome conversations had a direct messaging request component, while only 9% of the negative outcome conversations involved direct messaging. This difference shows that consumers were more likely to be satisfied when the airline showed effort to fix the issue that led to the negative sentiment.

### 4.2.5 Negative Sentiment Ending Negatively

This category includes all tweets that had been initiated with a negative sentiment by the consumer, and which subsequently ended with a negative outcome by airline response.

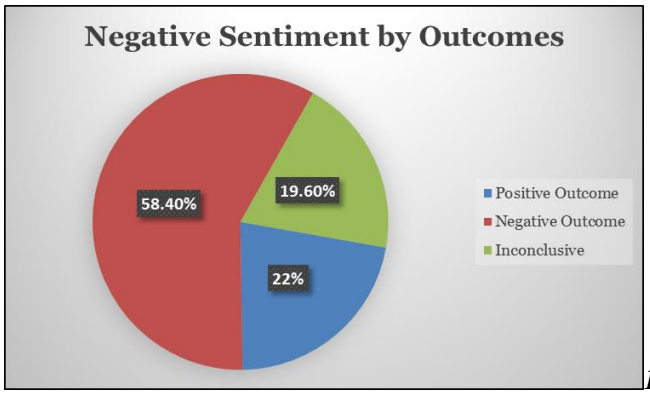



*Figure 14*

A total of 58.4% of these conversations that started negative remained negative (see figure 14). Also, 19.6% of these conversations had inconclusive outcomes. In this category, inconclusive is not necessarily a negative outcome, suggesting the airlines somewhat lessened the negative sentiment.

### 4.2.6 Information Seeking Ending Positively

All tweets that had been initiated by the consumer as information seeking, and which subsequently ended with a positive outcome were calculated by airline code. Of these conversations, a total of 62.1% of information seeking tweets had positive outcomes. Of the positive results for these conversations, 66.7% had an airline code component of handling questions (see figure 15).

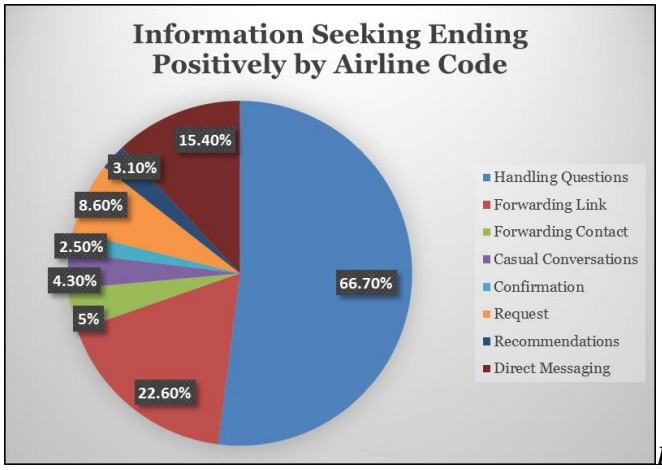


*Figure 15*

Only 5% of the positive outcome conversations in this arrangement have a forwarding contact component. This suggests, in this arrangement consumers are only seeking the specific information that prompted the initial question. Also, only 3.1% included a recommendation code component.

### 4.2.7 Information Seeking Ending Negatively

All tweets that had been initiated by the consumer as information seeking, and which subsequently ended with a negative outcome were calculated by airline code. This data shows that in 37.9% of these conversations the airlines did not meet the consumer expectations, with 19.9% ending in negative outcomes and 18% inconclusive outcomes.

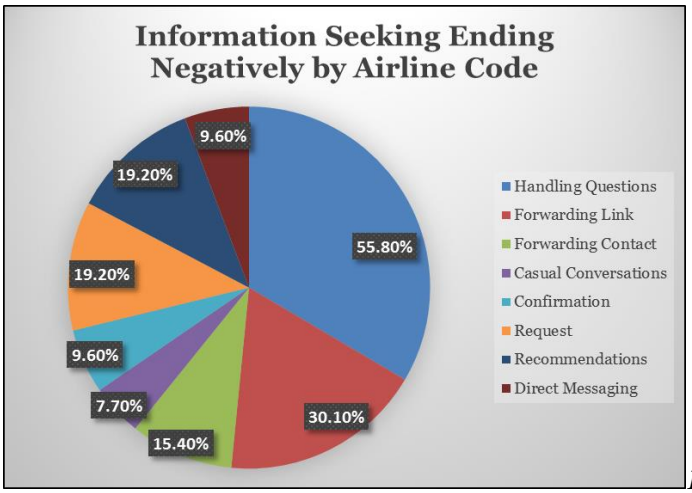


*Figure 16*

In this arrangement, only 55.8% had an airline code of handling questions component (see figure 16). This arrangement had 15.4% of conversations that included a forwarding contact component. And, 19.2% of these conversations included a recommendation component.

### 4.2.8 Information Providing Ending Positively

All tweets that had been initiated by the consumer as information providing, and which subsequently ended with a positive outcome were calculated by airline code. A total of 26.5% of these conversations had a positive outcome. Of these, 30.1% included a confirmation component in the conversation. Casual conversations and direct messaging both occurred 23.1% of the time in these conversations.

### 4.2.9 Information Providing Ending Negatively

All tweets that had been initiated by the consumer as information providing, and which subsequently ended with a negative outcome were calculated by airline code. Out of

these conversations identified as information providing, 53% resulted in a negative outcome. Of these negative outcomes, 61.5% of the conversations involved a confirmation component airline code.

### 4.2.10 Positive Outcomes

All tweets that ended with a positive outcome from the consumer's point of view were calculated, and the airlines response leading to this outcome was measured. Out of the 600 Twitter conversations analyzed, only 49.5% had a positive outcome. This figure is significant as it shows that over 50% of the consumer-initiated conversations on the airline Twitter feed ends in an unsatisfactory outcome. Also as seen in figure 17, 16.2% of the conversations had an inconclusive outcome.

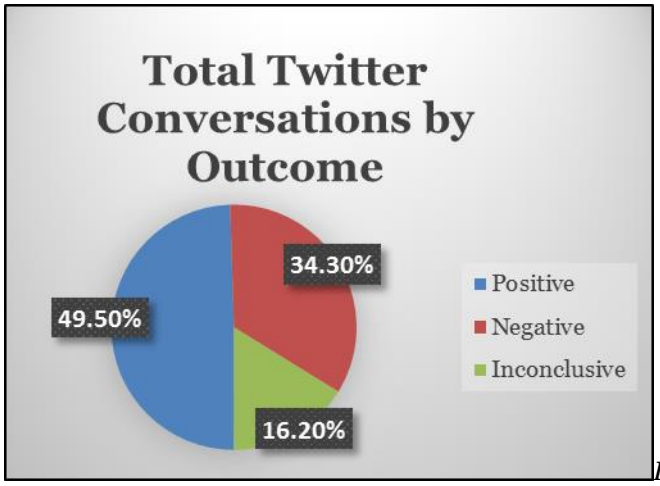



*Figure 17*

Of the 297 conversations that had a positive outcome, 40% of these included the component 'handling question'. Further, as seen in figure 18, of the conversations with positive endings, 31% of these contained the coding element 'casual conversation'. This can be compared with only 13.6% in the conversations that ended negatively.

Also shown in figures 18 and 19 conversations that utilize the 'confirmation' coding element consistently receive more negative outcomes. Here 6.7% of the positive conversations contain this, which is significantly lower than 24.3% of the negative conversations that contain this.

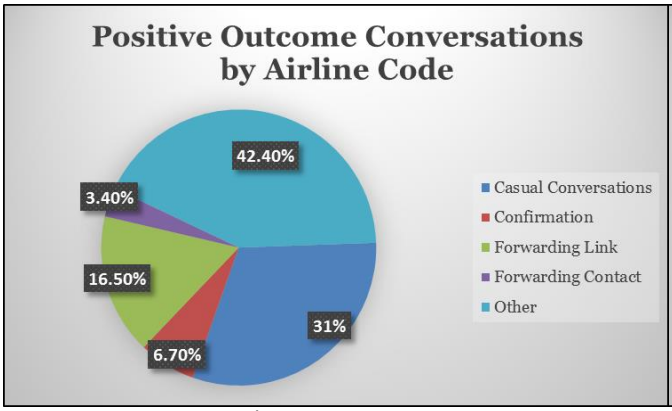



*Figure 18*

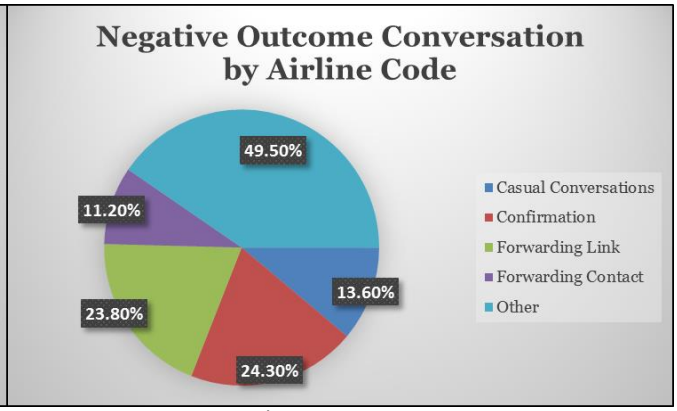



*Figure 19*

With regards to forwarding the consumers elsewhere, it can be seen in figures 18 and 19 that 23.8% of negative ending conversations involved the forwarding of a link, compared with 16.5% in the positive ending conversations. Also, in figure 19 it is shown that 11.2% of the negative outcome conversations involved the airline forwarding the consumer to a contact, compared with this feature only occurring 3.4% of the time in positive outcome conversations.

### 4.2.11 Negative Outcomes

All tweets that ended with a negative outcome from the consumer's point of view were calculated, and the airlines response leading to this outcome was measured. A total of 34.3% of all Twitter conversations collected resulted in a negative outcome.

From the conversations that ended negatively, it can be seen that 30.6% involved the 'handling question' component. This is almost a 10% difference between the positive outcomes that involved the same code.

Of the negative outcomes, 13.6% of conversations included a casual conversation component. As shown in figure 19 conversations that utilize the 'confirmation' coding element consistently receive more negative outcomes. Here 6.7% of the positive conversations contain this, which is significantly lower than 24.3% of the negative conversations that contain this.

With regards to forwarding the consumers elsewhere, it can be seen in figure 19 that 23.8% of negative ending conversations involved the forwarding of a link. Further, 11.2% of the negative outcome conversations involved the airline forwarding the consumer to a contact.

## 4.3 Survey Data

An online survey was conducted to establish consumer views towards engaging with airlines on Twitter, and consumer expectations and values with regards to these engagements see Appendix E (p. xi). Of the 72 consumers surveyed, 72.2% were female and 27.8% were male. The majority of the respondents were from the youngest age group category, with 41 of the respondents being aged between 18 and 24, and 23 of the respondents were aged between 25 and 34. Only 8 of the respondents were in the older five age brackets combined.

### 4.3.1 Question Category

Consumers were asked whether they would tweet an airline on Twitter to ask them a question – and whether they would expect and/or value a response from the airline. Of the respondents, 27.8% said they agreed or strongly agreed that they would tweet an airline with a question. Of this percentage, (figure 21) 100% said they would value a response from the airline – with 70% saying that they strongly agreed that they would value the response. This suggests that consumers find value in engagement from airlines on Twitter. Of this percentage, 85% said that they would expect a response from an airline to their question – again showing a high level of expectation from the airline.

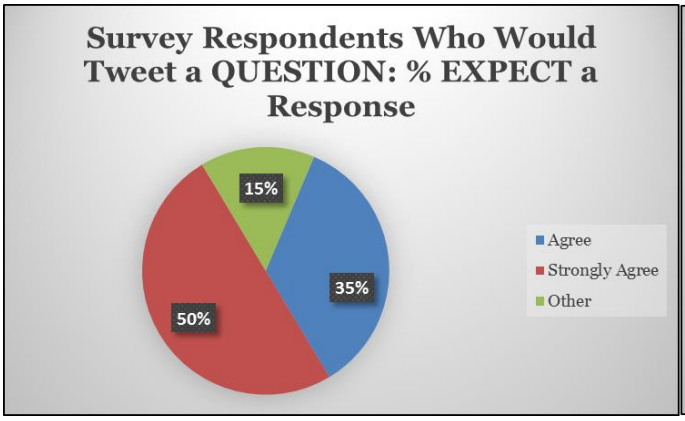



*Figure 20*

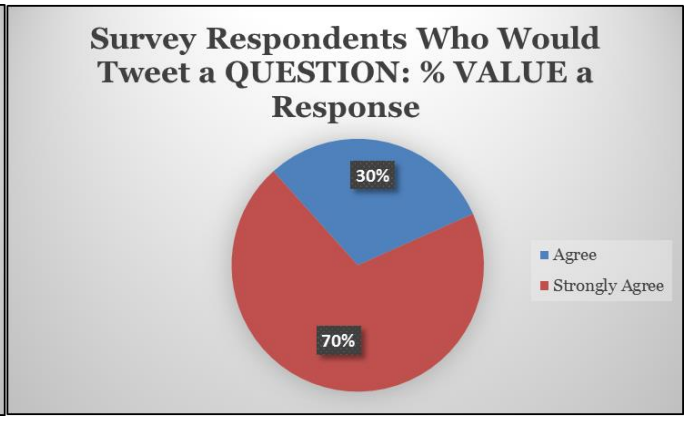



*Figure 21*

### 4.3.2 Complaint Category

The respondents were then asked whether they would tweet an airline to complain and whether they would value and/or expect a response to this from the airline. Of the respondents 34.7% said they agreed or strongly agreed that they would tweet an airline with a complaint – this aligns with the significant numbers of 'negative sentiment' that was seen in the total Twitter data collected. Of this percentage, (figure 22 and 23) 76% of

respondents said they would expect a response to their complaint and 88% said that they would value a response. These significantly high figures reveal that consumers expect engagement from airlines on Twitter, even when that engagement involves consumer complaint, anger, and negativity.

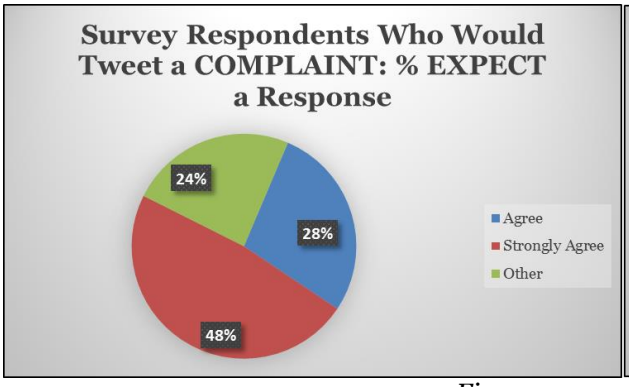



*Figure 22*

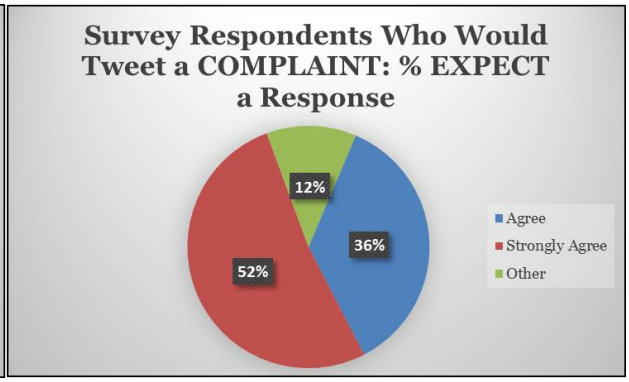



*Figure 23*

### 4.3.3 Compliment Category

The respondents were also questioned as to whether they would tweet an airline with a compliment, and if they would then expect and/or value a response to their compliment on Twitter. Of the respondents, 41.7% said that they strongly agree or agree that they indeed would tweet an airline with a compliment. Significantly lower than the expectations from a question and from a complaint, (figures 24 and 25) only 56.9% of respondents said they would expect a response from the airline to their compliment, with 93.3% stating they would value a response. This shows that almost all respondents felt they would value brand engagement and conversation with the airlines.

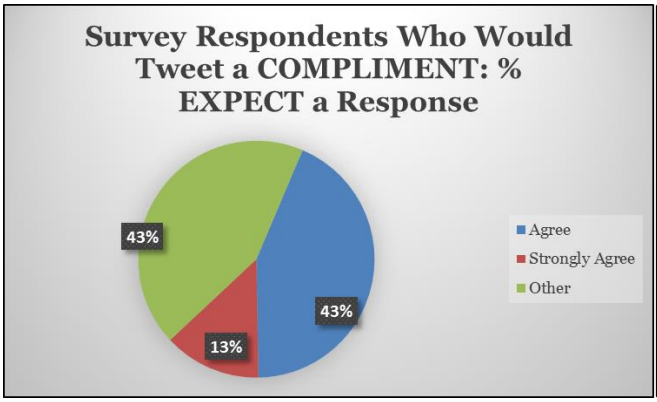



*Figure 24*

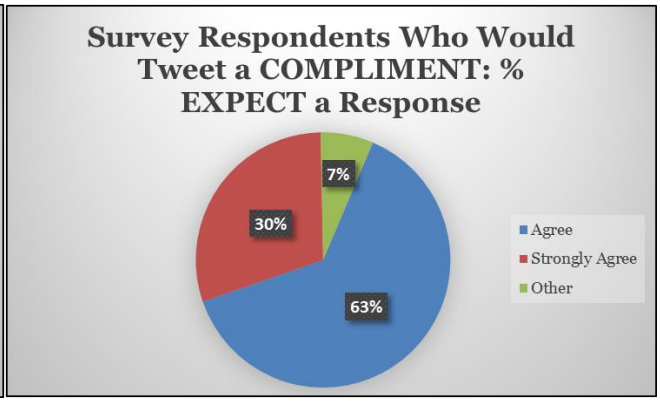



*Figure 25*

## 4.4 Comparison Data

### 4.4.1 Survey and Twitter Data

The Twitter conversations collected and the survey results showed two different patterns. Consumers have said they would be most likely to tweet an airline with a compliment, and least likely to tweet with a question, the Twitter conversations signified that in practice the order is reversed. In figure 9 it is shown that 46.8% were information seeking (e.g. questions), 29.8% were negative sentiments (e.g. complaints) and only 13% were positive sentiments (e.g. compliments). This compares with 27.8% who said they would ask a question, 34.7% who said they would tweet a complaint and 41.7% who said they would tweet a compliment. While the definitions of these different categories do not align identically, the premise is the same leading to a reasonable comparison.

### 4.4.2 Budget Airlines vs. Legacy Airlines

Respondents were also asked whether they were more likely to expect a response from a legacy airline, as opposed to a budget airline. The answer to this question did not incur a

dramatic difference in results, with 56.9% of consumers saying they would not be more likely to expect a response from a legacy airline. This shows a general consistency in the level of expectations from airlines on Twitter, regardless of whether they are budget airlines or otherwise.

### 4.4.3 JetBlue vs American Airlines

When the specific airlines in the data set were compared with the averages, it was found that one airline, Jet Blue, performed significantly better than the other airlines, and one airline, American Airlines, performed significantly worse. Here these two airlines will be compared to show any relevant factors in the differences of their performances on Twitter. This comparison offers a look at the quality of different airlines Twitter strategies.

Consumer attitude to American Airlines is remarkably different, with 60% of American's conversations being initiated by negative sentiment, compared with only 22% of Jet Blue's. Equally, only 9% American's conversations are initiated with a positive sentiment, compared with 44% of Jet Blues'. Notably 72% of Jet Blue's conversations had a positive outcome compared with only 21% of American's. Equally, only 22% of Jet Blue's conversations had a negative outcome, compared with 70% of American Airlines. These stark differences reveal that Jet Blue is more successful at handling its Twitter account and that it is satisfying consumers to a much greater extent than American Airlines is. While this is outside of the scope of the paper, the data was significant enough to highlight and may warrant further research.

The most important comparison between the two airlines is when customers are seeking information from them. Here it is not relevant that American receives more negative sentiment initiations and both airlines can be treated equally. Consumers were found to be seeking information from American in 23% conversations and from Jet Blue in 26% conversations – significantly similar figures. However, from these conversations American had only 34.8% ended positively, compared with 80.7% for Jet Blue as illustrated in figures 26 and 27. This substantial difference reveals the extent of the different Twitter practices by the airlines, in the way they are handling information seeking customers and satisfying their queries. In these situations, Jet Blue 'handles question' over double the amount of times that American does with 14% and 5% respectively. With this it can be reinforced that consumers are looking for a direct answer to their questions, and are less likely to be satisfied by being forwarded elsewhere.

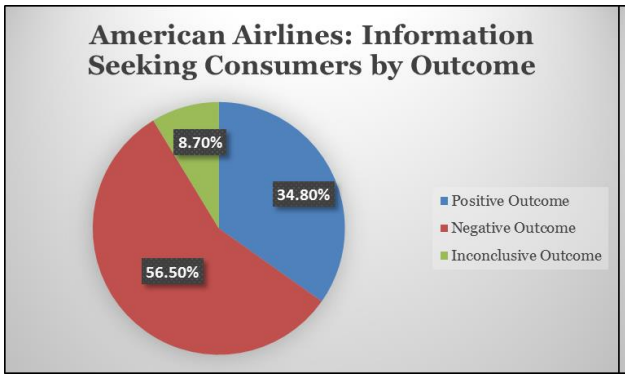



*Figure 26*

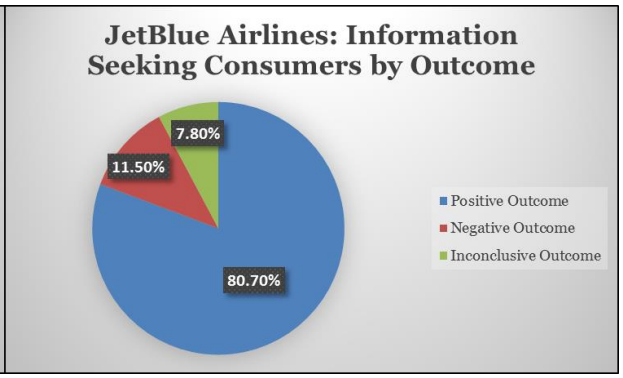



*Figure 27*

## 4.8 Chapter Summary

The raw data found that almost half of the engagements between airline brands and consumers on Twitter were information seeking, this supports the concept that

consumers are utilizing Twitter as a customer service platform. There was also a significant number of consumers using Twitter to complain to brands, showing Twitter is utilized also as an outlet for the consumer to complain, and to expect feedback from the airline.

Several components were found to be viewed more positively by the consumer, these were: handling questions, casual conversations and direct messaging. These elements were more likely to end the conversation with the positive outcome. Equally, there were components that were more likely to end the conversation negatively. These were found to be: recommendations, requests, confirmation and forwarding the consumer elsewhere.

The survey concluded that consumers both expect and place a high level of value on a response from an airline brand on Twitter, and consequently brands should be meeting these consumer expectations on Twitter.

This data set was used to see specifically how consumers and airlines interacted and behaved on Twitter both together and independently and was then analyzed in terms of the theoretical components; communication theory, customer satisfaction theory, and social CRM, in an attempt to consider if these theories are sufficient in the Twitter platform arena.

## 5.0 Analysis

After careful coding and results classification of all of the data, the data was then analyzed to show findings in relation to the thesis question, first by applying the data findings with the specific theories introduced in Chapter 2, then analyzing practical implications with the creation of a model to be used as a guideline.

## 5.1 Theoretical Analysis of Findings

### 5.1.1 Communication Theory

Traditional communication theory introduces the concept that communication is a linear path from the message sender to the message receiver, as can be recognized in Berlo's SMCR Model of Communication (Berlo, 1963). However, in the public forum of Twitter, where 'the message' can be viewed by anyone, responded to instantly, and can also be shared widely – this simplistic understanding ignores the magnitude and importance of the response. Here the concept of 'issue arenas' arises, which is the idea that in the digital setting stakeholder interactions occur outside of the control of the brands (Luoma-aho, 2010). This applies to Twitter, where any individual can pass comment and judgment on a brand publicly, and significantly can also involve themselves in any conversations. Consumers can be witness to all conversations airline brands are having, and can interject at will. This shows a significant need for transparency and honesty from airline brands on Twitter, and also emphasizes that any sentiment shared on Twitter can impact consumers' perceptions towards a brand.

It can be seen in the data that almost 30% of conversations were initiated with a negative sentiment from the consumer. This is a significant number of public conversations with a tone of negativity towards the brand, and it is important that brands can turn this negativity around, so that public brand image is of a more positive sentiment. This figure of almost 30% negativity compares with a lesser 13% of conversations being initiated with positive sentiment, this shows the inclination of consumers towards sharing negative thought publicly, which can be harmful to brand image. Importantly, of these negative conversations, only 22% of them ended positively. This shows a clear area of potential opportunity for airline brands on Twitter, and also emphasizes the level of negativity towards airline brands on Twitter. This public level of negativity should be a concern for brand image.

Schramm's model of communication bears relevance to conversations on Twitter, in that rather than a linear communication; Schramm identifies the perpetual flow of messages, and equally emphasizes the relevance of the receiver's interpretation of the message. Schramm discusses that the knowledge and understanding of both the sender and receiver play an integral role in the interpretation of the message, and the flow of the communication (MSG, 2013). This relates to conversations on Twitter not just with the relevance of the individual receiver's knowledge and understanding, but also to that of the public forum. Firstly, this implies that airline brands on Twitter must be aware of how messages can be interpreted by different audiences, and therefore must be careful of how potential interpretations could affect brand image. Secondly, this implies that receiver's preconceptions play an element in the appreciation of responses. The context

the receiver places the message in, as well as his prior knowledge will affect how he understands it, and this means that the same practice cannot always guarantee successful results. This is supported in the data, in that no one means of replying to consumers ever yielded 100% success or failure. This shows that the consumer himself plays a role in the success of the communication, and the difficulties in categorizing consumer values.

The data shows that almost 60% of the conversations that started negative remained negative, despite airline effort to change this. While this figure shows room for improvement, it also supports that some consumer preconceptions will not allow for a positive outcome, whereas others are fully open to it.

The comparison between Jet Blue and American airlines equally supports the sentiment of consumers having preconceptions of the airline's engagement. Where 60% of American's conversations were initiated with negative sentiment, only 22% of Jet Blue's were – this shows an overall shared negative attitude to American from consumers, which arises from preconceptions. It is especially pertinent that American struggled to turn negative sentiment into positive conversations, implying that some consumers may not have been open to this option.

### 5.1.2 Social Networks

Along with consumer preconceptions altering the interpretation of messages, the overall culture of social media can also have an impact. Cultural elements can affect the understanding of the message (Gemma, 2013), and while typically in the literature this will refer to elements such as beliefs and ideals, it can also relate to the structure and setting of the conversation. Twitter culture includes elements such as the limited character count and a sense of immediacy, with expectations of instant response. These cultural elements mean a lack of space to explain questions and answers alike, with less time spent attempting to phrase these messages. This can potentially lead to misunderstandings and confusion in interpreting the message.

### 5.1.3 Customer Satisfaction Theory

With the shift from traditional transactional marketing to relationship marketing (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997), consumer satisfaction theory emphasizes that consumer satisfaction is key to consumer retention (Kotler, 1994). Developing a relationship with the consumer is integral to brand perceptions, and Twitter is an appropriate platform for building and maintaining relationships. Developments in digital platforms and the use of social media has allowed computer-mediated conversations to carry emotions and context in ways that are comparable to face-to-face conversations (Luoma-aho, 2010). Here social media users view the interaction as significantly as a human interaction, in terms of expectations. By utilizing elements on Twitter such as casual conversation and personal touches like using the consumer's name, airline brands can engage with the consumer to a greater extent and come closer

to replicating face-to-face interaction and building relationships. In the data it can be see that in almost 100% of the conversations that start positively and stay positive 'casual conversation' is used by the airline. This emphasizes the value found by the consumer in replicating the conversation like a personal engagement, and the appreciation placed on casual conversation in relationship building. Equally, in almost 30% of the conversations that turned from negative to positive, the airline utilized casual conversation in their response. This again shows the value to be found in using casual conversation, and its potential to turn negative sentiment into a positive conversation in this public forum.

Consumer satisfaction theory discusses that consumer satisfaction with a company's products or services is often viewed as the key to long-term success and competitiveness (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997). This should not end here, but instead should be expanded to encompass to all consumer interactions with the brand. For consumers to value the brand, and to be satisfied with it, service should be consistent at all levels of interaction, whether it's contact with a product or conversation with the brand online. All of these elements have the potential to deter a consumer and to alter their perception of the brand image, or equally to build a successful relationship. Equally, brands recognize that engaging with the social web and with Twitter is an imperative element in sustaining competitive advantage (King, 2014). Social networks such as Twitter have shaped the way consumers engage and interpret the value of brand, and consequently brands should be capitalizing on this by using Twitter to their own competitive advantage (Mosadegh, 2011). To maintain a competitive advantage, airlines must be

satisfying consumers, building a relationship and emphasizing a positive brand image. To do this it is important that brands are satisfying consumer expectations. The data found that almost 50% of the conversations were information seeking from the consumer – this reveals that a large amount of consumers are using airline Twitter accounts to receive information, and are clearly expecting their query to be resolved on this platform. Importantly, almost 40% of these information-seeking conversations did not end with a positive outcome, meaning that regularly airlines are not meeting consumer expectations on Twitter, and consequently are not satisfying their consumers. Overall, only 50% of the conversations had positive outcomes, meaning that again, airlines are regularly not satisfying consumers on Twitter. Clearly this is an area where airlines could improve, in an effort for greater consumer satisfaction and competitive advantage.

Importantly, social media and Twitter allows for co-creation of brand value between the airline and the consumer (Piskorski, 2011). Each time a consumer takes the time to interact with the brand online, he is helping to create and shape the brand image. The data shows that 100% of consumers would value a response from the airline to a question on Twitter, and almost 95% would value a response to a compliment. This shows the willingness of the consumer to engage with the airline on Twitter, and their appreciation of interaction and co-creation of value. Consumers want engagement and response, and value the opportunity to be involved with the brand.

### 5.1.4 Social Customer Relationship Management

Social customer relationship management (CRM) is the way in which brands can begin to understand and evaluate their consumers' behavior in an attempt to better manage the consumer behavior. Specifically, social CRM is a subset of the theory of Collaborative CRM which related to all of the channels in which the consumer can communicate with the brand, such as Twitter (Mosadegh, 2011).

Social CRM engages the consumer in collaborative conversations with the brand, with the consumer maintaining the power in this highly visible social setting. This social setting is a highly transparent forum and is recognized by consumers has a highly transparent environment with an assumed level of honesty from the brand. This is reflected in the way that the data set shows how consumers are utilizing the airline Twitter accounts. 46.8% of the conversations were information seeking and 36% of all of the conversations involved a handling questions component. Due to the high level of transparency, consumers are more likely to trust the information from this source. This also is reflected with the 35.7% of conversations that began with negative sentiment. Consumers are using Twitter as a way to voice their complaints and concerns with their brands, using this transparent forum to not only engage the brand, but also to include other consumers.

Social CRM is viewed as an effective relationship marketing instrument to be used to build close relationships with consumers and also to enhance consumer perceptions of

these relationships (Smith, 1999). Much of the data that was collected for this paper supports this, as it is clear that consumers and airline brands are communicating extensively and about many different things via the airline Twitter accounts. The consumer survey that was completed as part of this thesis shows the power of these relationships as well as the consumer expectation of the brand building and nurturing these relationships. As the survey data shows, 85% of consumers who would tweet a question to an airline expect a response and 100% value a response from the brand.

This reinforces what brands are already showing that they know that consumers value the relationships that are able to be built with a brand and even more importantly, consumers expect this from brands. Nearly 24% of all conversations had a casual conversation component from the brand, which is a strong and valuable way for the brand to engage the consumer and build a mutually beneficial relationship. Interestingly, 97.1% of the conversations that began with positive sentiment also contained the casual conversations component, showing the value in engaging consumers that are simply interacting in a positive manner with the brand. These short casual conversations enhance the social CRM of the brand and also, due to the transparency of social media, show other consumers how the brand values relationship building with consumers.

This data shows that consumers are most satisfied when the brand is able to correctly judge what the consumer wants as a response and then gives it to them. This is highlighted in the fact that 66.7% of the conversations that were information seeking

included a handling questions component. An important tool of relationship building for brands is to interpret what the consumers want and then to create the correct and appropriate response. Consumers showed that when this did not happen, they were not satisfied, leading to the conclusion that the brand must take the time to identify what the consumer values and then offer what they value, if this is not happening, it ends up being detrimental to the brand and does not aid in relationship building with consumers.

One set of data that further shows this point is that of the consumers that initiated a conversation via Twitter to the airline with an information seeking component, but then had a negative outcome. This occurred nearly 20% of the time with information seeking conversations. If the brand is not adding the value that the consumer is looking for into the conversation, then the brand is not building the relationship and it should be considered a failure of the social CRM strategy. In some cases, the consumers' problems were outside the scope of Twitter and the brand requested a direct message conversation to occur with the consumer. This occurred in 15.8% of all conversations. While the direct message removes the conversation from the public forum, the brand still made a public announcement that they were taking care of the consumer.

Furthermore, looking at the amount of positive outcomes that included causal conversations (25.3%) versus negative outcomes that involved causal conversations (9.2%), the data shows how important consumers view the brands actively working to build and expand the relationship with the consumer.

In order for social CRM to be effective, brands must utilize the highly transparent and public forum, such as Twitter, to enhance the brand by building up relationships with consumers. If these interactions are ending with a negative outcome, this can actually be detrimental to the brand image. In this data set it is shown that not all airlines are equal in their implementation of social CRM. In comparing JetBlue airlines and American Airlines, the data shows drastic differences between how their consumers utilize their Twitter accounts. For example, JetBlue had 44% conversations with positive sentiment while American only had 9%. This shows that in a comparison, JetBlue consumers are reaching out with the expectation of the brand working to build a relationship, while American consumers are not having this expectation. This is a clear area of focus for American Airlines, as Twitter can be highly valuable in brand image.

### 5.1.5 Empowered Consumer

The empowered consumer is a direct result of the digital advancements that have occurred over the recent past, now giving consumers so much power that they must be viewed as co-creators of brands (Wind, 2008). This new type of consumer has expectations of multiple channels to reach a brand and this expectation should be viewed as a necessity to create a brand loyalty with these consumers (Wind, 2008). This means, quite simply, consumers that initiate conversations via Twitter expect and require a response. This is backed up with the survey data where 85% of consumer asking a question expect a response, 76% of consumers voicing a complaint expect a response, and 56.7% of consumers tweeting a compliment expect a response.

While the need for social CRM is clear, it is important to note that it is not enough to simply transfer a digital strategy into the social environment such as Twitter (Piskorski, 2011). Instead, brands must specifically create a strategy to utilize Twitter and strategies also will vary between social media platforms. These strategies should come from the knowledge and basis that individuals use social media to connect to other people (Piskorski, 2011). This is further shown in the data that 12.2% of conversations began with positive sentiment and of these 95.9% remained positive. These consumers' only purpose of initiating these conversations with the brand is to connect.

Brands must be aware of their consumer expectations and needs in order to fulfil them to create this brand loyalty. This data showed that the majority of consumers fit into four categories: information seeking, information providing, positive sentiment and negative sentiment. These four categories of consumers all are seeking something different and unique from the brand when they reach out for engagement. Knowing what they want and also knowing specifically what they do not want is critical for brand success, even more so in this highly public forum. Consumers have enormous power, especially with negative comments or sentiment. The data showed that out of the conversations that began with negative sentiment only 22% ended positively. The importance of turning these negative conversations to positive is high as it is broadcast in a public forum and goes beyond just one single consumer.

These interactions via Twitter can be used to build the brand, but also has the power to hurt or belittle the brand if the company does not respond to this interaction correctly.

This fact leads to the practical implications of this thesis. This theory shows the critical importance of the responses to the interactions, that the responses equal what the consumer is looking for and should work towards a positive outcome. As these positive outcomes directly impact the brand image, we have developed a guideline in the form of a model of what the most value responses for each consumer is. This guideline is intended to be used for brands to improve their social CRM and increase the value of the responses to consumers.

## 5.2 Practical Analysis of Findings

As shown in the theoretical review of this data, it has been shown the significance in brands developing a comprehensive and detailed social CRM strategy to ensure that when consumers seek out and initiate conversations, brands need to have a set strategy to build the relationship.

In order to create a guideline for practical use based on this data, the basic theoretical concepts as discussed above were paired with the actual data set to create a model. Through the analysis of the data, trends were identified in order to create guidelines to predict what different consumer types expect and value from the brand during communication. The four main types of consumers initiating conversations with brands on Twitter are; information seeking, information providing, positive sentiment, and negative sentiment.

Information seeking consumers statistically had a higher rate of positive outcomes when the airline handled questions (66.7% of positive outcomes) or requested a direct message conversation (15.4% of positive outcomes). These same consumers had a higher rate of negative outcomes when the airline offered recommendations (19.2% of negative outcomes), forwarding link (30.1% of negative outcomes), or forwarding contact (15.4% negative outcomes). This leads us to conclude that for this consumer set, it is most beneficial to handle the question the consumer is asking via Twitter or within a direct message, and we discourage directing the consumer elsewhere to receive an answer for the question they are seeking.

Information providing consumers showed an overall low rate of positive outcomes at only 26.5%. Of these positive outcomes, 23.1% involved casual conversations and 23.1% involved direct messaging requests from the airline. This contrasts with the negative outcomes in which only 3.8% involved casual conversations and 11.5% involved direct messaging request. This leads us to the conclusion that information providing consumers value these two airline responses and lead to a higher rate of positive outcomes. The negative outcomes for this consumer category saw a high rate of confirmation at 61.5% and forwarding link at 23.1%, which contrast greatly with the positive outcomes in which only 30.1% involved confirmation and 7.6% involved forwarding link. This leads us to the conclusion that information providing consumers have a higher value of casual conversations and direct messaging, which is direct engagement, and a negative reaction to confirmation and forwarding link which both

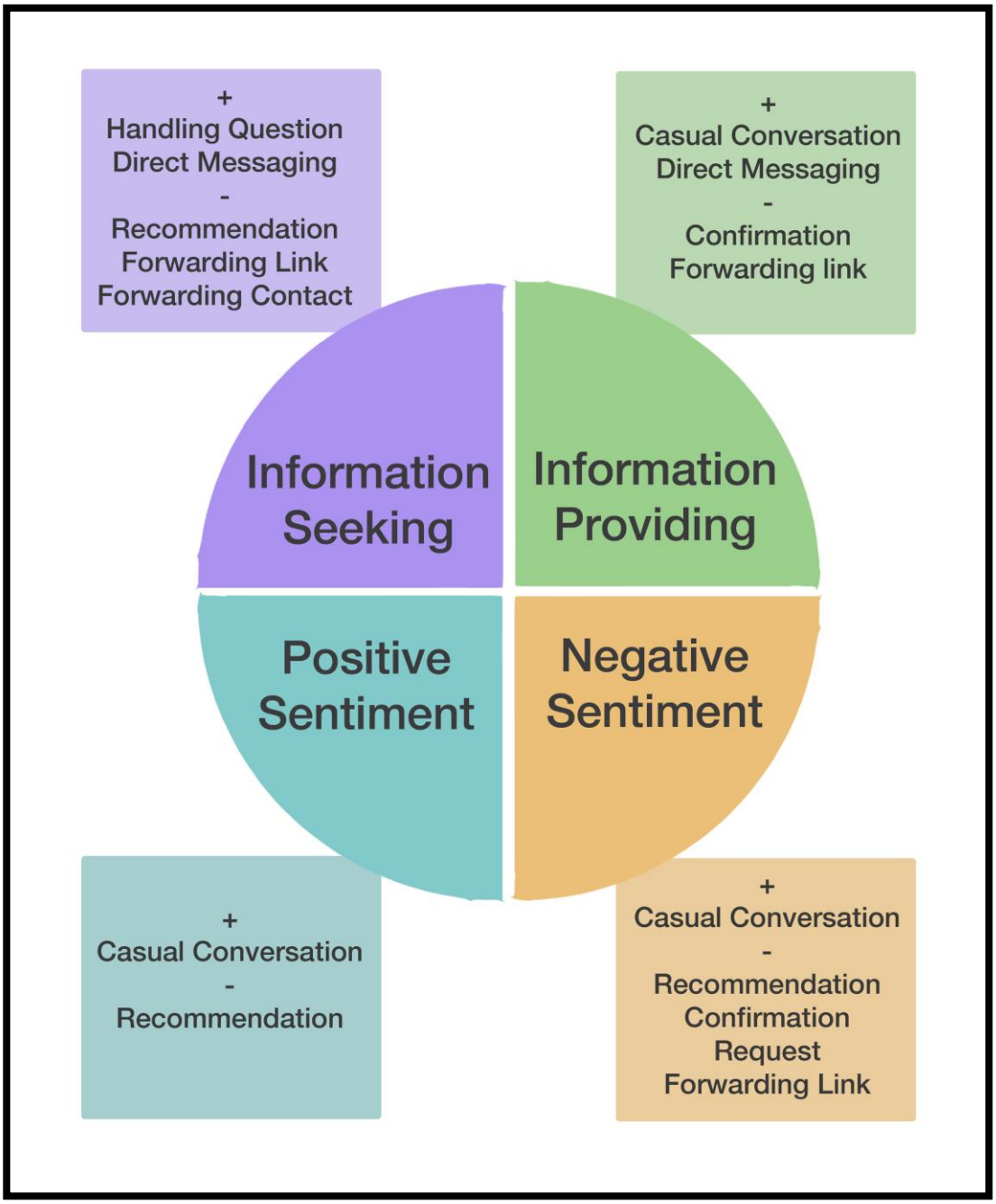
are not engaging actions from the brands. Therefore, the model encourages the brand to seek out engagement, as the social CRM theory also suggests.

Positive sentiment consumers are consumers which are offering positive thoughts and experiences with the brand and are specifically seeking engagement with the brand, but are not seeking any sort of answers or recommendations. With this consumer set, nearly 96% of the conversations resulted in a positive outcome, with 97.1% of these positive outcomes including casual conversations. This shows that the consumers' values direct engagement with the brand. As these consumers are seeking out engagement we also do not recommend that the brand offers recommendations of other services, but instead focuses on building the relationship with the consumer to create brand loyalty.

Negative sentiment consumers are consumers who are unsatisfied from the beginning and are a very important group of consumers for the brand to interact with. Only 22% of the negative sentiment conversations ended in a positive outcome. Of these positive outcomes, 29.8% involved casual conversations, while the negative outcomes only saw a rate of 17.6% of casual conversations. This suggests that there is value in the direct engagement with these consumers, with a focus on building a relationship. The negative outcomes in this group suggest there are responses that the airline can offer that do not improve the situation, but are more likely to keep the conversation negative. These conversations involved recommendations (7.2%), confirmation (23.2%), request (28.8%) and forwarding link (21.6%). The data suggests that these consumers see more value in just engaging with the brand than other responses.

Overall, this data set supports the theories that were previously discussed in detail in the theoretical analysis portion. Consumer engagement is critical in a success of communication tool such as Twitter. The model below is intended to be used as a guideline to aide in consumer satisfaction, increased value of communication, and a more effective social CRM strategy for airline brands.

### 5.2.1 Model


+
Handling Question
Direct Messaging
-
Recommendation
Forwarding Link
Forwarding Contact
+
Casual Conversation
Direct Messaging
-
Confirmation
Forwarding link
Information Seeking
Information Providing
Positive Sentiment
Negative Sentiment
+
Casual Conversation
-
Recommendation
+
Casual Conversation
-
Recommendation
Confirmation
Request
Forwarding Link

### 5.2.2 Explanation of Model

The model is broken down into the four most common consumer engagements with airline brands on Twitter as found through the data. These are: information seeking, information providing, positive sentiment and negative sentiment. Definitions of these are explained in the methodology section in Chapter 3 and they were developed through the coding system. Each of the four sections leads to positive recommendations as to the best means of response to the particular consumer by the airline, and negative responses which are recommended to be avoided. These responses align with the responses found through the development of the coding system, and have been measured through an analysis of the data. The data was analyzed to discover the particular responses to specific initiations that yielded positive and negative results. This allowed the development of conclusions as to what are the most recommended, and least successful responses for consumer satisfaction.

For example, the model finds that if the consumer initiates the communication with a positive sentiment, the most appropriate means of response for consumer satisfaction is using casual conversation, and the airline should avoid making a recommendation.

### 5.2.3 Application of Model

The model has been created as a guideline for airline brands to recognize the most appropriate, and equally least appropriate, forms of communication with consumers on Twitter dependent on the consumer's style of initiation.

It is recommended that employees of the airline brand that are working in the social media department use the model. The social media airline employee must identify which of the four categories the consumer engagement aligns with, and from there he can use the model to recognize the most appropriate method of response. The benefit of the model is that it is a clear-cut means of identifying how to respond to consumers on Twitter and avoids uncertainty. The model is designed to incur maximum consumer satisfaction over Twitter and has been designed from the point of view of what the consumer most wants to receive. By achieving consumer satisfaction swiftly in the Twitter conversation, airline brands can save time and effort, and will not have to return to the same customers for multiple responses.

### 5.3 Chapter Summary

Sentiment shared by brands on Twitter can be widely viewed and scrutinized under this public forum. As the understanding of the message relates to the individual's cultures and knowledge this public setting can impact consumer perceptions of the brand, even for those who are not engaged in the communication. With Twitter often being utilized for complaint and negativity, this public image must be responded to, to protect brand image and defer consumer preconceptions. Currently, airline brands are struggling to transfer negativity into a positive outcome.

The culture of social media differs from other communications, and elements such as the limited character count on Twitter alter the way communications can occur. An understanding of this culture is imperative to avoid misinterpretations and communication breakdowns between airline and consumer, particularly in the age of

the empowered consumer. Where consumers can control the conversation, and where anyone's opinion can be heard, miscommunications must be avoided, and it is important to reflect on the public setting.

Consumers' value relationships and response from brands on Twitter, and this digital platform can convey emotions in a similar way as face-to-face communication can. Utilizing this opportunity for personal engagement is key to relationship building and customer satisfaction. Currently airline brands are failing to meet consumer expectations on Twitter, with a substantial amount of the conversations ending negatively. This is an opportunity for social customer relationship management and should be considered as such. An effort to provide relationships and consumer satisfaction on Twitter can be beneficial for brand engagement.

As Twitter is a public platform, trust and transparency are expectations from the consumer. Equally, it is shown that consumers value casual conversations with the airline brands. These elements support relationship building and a feeling of trust towards the brand. Using casual conversations enhances the social CRM of the brand, and through the public setting, reveals to other consumers where the brand places value regards relationship building.

Social media platforms require their own specific customer relationship management strategies considering the cultures of the platform, and it is not so simple as to apply one

overall digital strategy. Brands must understand the consumer expectations that are unique to the social media platform and must work to fulfil these specific expectations. In doing so loyalty can be created, relationships can be strengthened and positive brand image can be supported.

# 6. Conclusion

## 6.1 Research Aim and Objective

The purpose of this research paper was to gain a clear understanding of consumer attitudes and expectations whilst engaging in conversation with airline brands on the social media platform Twitter. This paper worked to understand what manner of interactions consumers find valuable when engaging with airline brands on Twitter, and examined how airlines could predict and deliver these valued responses. Also, this paper looked at traditional communication theories, customer satisfaction theories, and empowered consumer theories and how these concepts can aid in strengthening airline brands' social CRM strategies. Finally, this paper utilized the theoretical findings, coupled with the data findings to create a model to be used as a guideline for airlines to improve future interactions with consumers on Twitter.

In order to achieve this firstly a thorough review of the literature was implemented. Theories surrounding social customer relationship management, consumer satisfaction and communication were considered in order to gain an understanding of the field. More specific literature surrounding both the airline industry and Twitter were also necessary for gaining a solid background on the subject.

Furthering this, a method that was a combination of qualitative and quantitative was devised in order to discover consumer expectations of airlines on Twitter and how airlines should respond to these. This considered 600 consumer-brand conversations

across six different airlines on Twitter. These were analyzed as part of a netnography study, and a coding system was developed to recognize the areas where consumers were satisfied and found value, and equally to understand where airlines were failing to meet consumer expectations. The findings of the netnography study supported the creation of a survey, which was then used to measure consumer values of airline brands on Twitter.

## 6.2 Findings

The netnography study found that:

- Consumers are using Twitter as a customer service platform.
- Consumers are using airline Twitter accounts as an outlet for complaints.
- Casual conversation, the airline handling the question, and the offer of Direct Messaging were more likely to lead to a positive outcome.
- Recommendations, requests for more information and forwarding the consumer elsewhere were more likely to lead to a negative outcome.

The web survey found that:

- Consumers regularly expect a response from an airline on Twitter, particularly when the conversation is initiated with a question.
- Consumers place a high level of value on a response from an airline on Twitter.

## 6.3 Theoretical Implications

Through an analysis of the existing theory it was found that present social customer relationship management theories do not fully encompass the ever-changing and culturally significant social media platforms. Customer satisfaction theories and

communication theories were considered as subset elements of customer relationship management theory, and while these could align with a basic understanding of the principles of CRM social media, they could not fully grasp unique culture of Twitter and the significance of the empowered consumer. Elements such as the reduced character count on Twitter and the expectations of immediate response need to be adapted to a more specific theory, which better understands this vast communication platform.

Theoretical Findings

- Consumers play an active role in the success of communication
- Consumers view interaction with brands on Twitter the same as direct human interaction
- Casual conversations and engagement can enhance social CRM strategies
- Twitter as a platform requires a unique strategy to be successful

Social media as a whole is extremely quick to change and adapt, and because of this the ability to create proven, standing theory is limited. This means there is a limit on existing theories specific to social CRM on individual social media platforms. We propose that while this theory begins to emerge, brands can utilize standard theories on communication and customer satisfaction to create a comprehensive social CRM strategy to build relationships with the empowered consumer. Knowing consumer expectations, and what the consumer values, will lead to a successful implementation of these concepts in social CRM.

## 6.4 Practical Implications

As stated in the theoretical implications, it is important for brands to know what consumers want, expect, and value. In the airline and Twitter sector, airlines need to offer consumers what they are seeking when asked. The model that was proposed is intended as a guideline for brands to use when responding to consumers in an attempt to best build relationships and work towards positive outcomes. Social media platforms, such as Twitter need to be a focus when brands develop their social CRM strategies to remain competitive in today's business world. It has already been shown that consumers have rising expectations and this model can practically help brands to meet these expectations.

## 6.5 Limitations

We acknowledge that this research thesis does have some limitations which should be stated. First, the data set was only completed with six different airlines, a small portion of the complete airline industry brand profile. While the paper specifically tried to choose a variety of airlines, it is unknown if this data can be expanded to all airlines in all countries. Also, as stated previously, the current theories of social media and Twitter are developing and trying to keep up with an ever-changing landscape of the social media world and consumer. As this theory develops and as the uses of Twitter change, these findings may be limited in their application.

## 6.6 Future Research

This thesis paper specifically focused on Twitter and did not take into consideration other social media platforms. Twitter differs from other social media platforms in that

the users only are allowed 140 characters and also there is an expectations of extremely fast reply. Future research could involve a more comprehensive look at social media platforms outside of Twitter to see if the same results happen among the other platforms. As the model and conclusions are only applied to the airline industry, future research would be required to see if the theory and models could be applied and transferred to other industries.

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# Appendix A: Twitter Raw Data

***Due to the extensive volume of transcribed data, the full set of data is available in a separate file. This is showing only a representation of the first ten conversations out of 600 total conversations.***

| Convo # | Tweet Conversation (transcribed exactly as written) |
|---|---|
| | EasyJet Airlines |
| 1 | Customer - @Easyjet hi! My wife and son were flying today (ezy7687, lis-bsl) and our stroller suffered some damage. What should we do? Thx in advance<br>Easyjet - Hi Pedro, I'm sorry to hear about your damaged stroller. I'm sending you the link where you can find the steps to follow: link<br>Customer - Thank you very much! Happy Easter! |
| 2 | Customer - Only a 3 and a half hour delay and awful customer service! Thanks @Easyjet (Thumbs up emoji)<br>Easyjet - Hi George, I'm sorry to hear about this. Please see this link for your entitlements: link. Thanks, Ioanna<br>Customer - It's ok just joking (crying laughter emoji) these things happen (thumbs up emoji) |
| 3 | Customer - @easyjet Standard (Image of flight board showing delays)<br>Easyjet - Hi Carl. Apologies for that. Please keep an eye on Flight Tracker for the latest updates: link<br>Customer - lol thanks, just a moaner traveller!<br>Easyjet - Hi Carl, I fully understand that :) I hope you'll take off soon and have a very pleasant flight. Thanks, Martyna<br>Customer - Cheers M |
| 4 | Customer - Still waiting for @tevans1192… bad weather at Innsbruck… bussed to Munich… 6 hour delay @easyjet, but not their fault!<br>Easyjet - Hi, Apologies for the delay! I hope that passengers will reach their destination point soon. Thanks, Martyna<br>Customer - no worries, not your fault that weathers bad at Innsbruck! Tricky airport at the best of times I know. Just bring son @tevans1192 home! |
| 5 | Customer - When will we know about flights from Paris-Bristol next Thursday. Airstrike.<br>Easyjet - Hi Grant, Please keep an eye on Flight Tracker for the latest updates - link. Thanks, Martyna.<br>Customer - Ok, thanks Martyna |
| 6 | Customer - Just about to print my tickets and then straight heading to the airport. @easyjet sure gonna reach London safely this afternoon ;)<br>Easyjet - Hi Filiz, please check Flight Tracker for your flight's latest status: link. Thanks, Ioanna<br>Customer - All went well on today's flight so just wanna say thanks to the whole team ;) They were adorable ;) |
| 7 | Customer - Hi - my son's phone broke w/his electronic boarding pass on it and he has a flight at 9:55 tonight. Can he get a boarding pass at BFS?<br>Easyjet - Hi, Yes, it's possible. In order to do that, please tell him to be at the airport at least 2 hours prior to scheduled time of departure. Thanks, Martyna.<br>Customer - Thank you Martyna! |
| 8 | Customer -<br>Great flight back with @easyjet. Washmeplease (picture of dirty aircraft with 'wash me please' written in the dirt<br>Easyjet - Hi Megan, thanks for bringing this to our attention. What's your flight number? Thanks, Martyna<br>Customer - EZY8364<br>Easyjet - Hi Megan, Thank you. We'll look after the aircraft :) Thanks. Martyna<br>Customer - was a great flight don't worry! |
| 9 | Customer - Easyjet at London Southend Airport @easyjet @Airline pics (picture of an aeroplane)<br>Easyjet - Hi Ben, Thanks for sharing this great photo! :) Cheers, Martyna<br>Customer - Thanks Easyjet Can U Follow Me<br>Customer - Hi Ben, Sure! We've just followed you :) Cheers, Martyna<br>Customer – Thanks |
| 10 | Customer - @Easyjet are you going to add more routes from Southend<br>Easyjet - Hi Ben, Our flights are now available to book up until the 28th of February 2016. There's nothing to update at the moment,<br>Easyjet - But as soon as we have any news we'll let you know. Thanks, Martyna<br>Customer - Thanks again Easyjet! |

## Appendix B: Coded Data Example

***Due to the extensive amount of conversations that were coded, the entire list of codes with conversations is listed in a separate document.***

| Convo# | Response | Convo # | Response |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | C – Information Seeking<br>A – Forwarding link<br>O – Positive | 15 | C – Sentiment – positive<br>A – Casual conversation<br>O – Positive |
| 2 | C – Sentiment - negative<br>A – Forwarding Link<br>O – Positive | 16 | C – Information providing<br>A – Casual conversation<br>C – Information providing<br>A – Forwarding link<br>O – Positive |
| 3 | C – Sentiment - negative<br>A - Forwarding Link<br>C – Sentiment - positive<br>A – Casual Conversations<br>O – Positive | 17 | C – Sentiment - negative<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive |
| 4 | C – Comment<br>A – Causal Conversation<br>O - Positive | 18 | C – Sentiment – positive<br>A – Forwarding link + Casual conversation<br>O – Positive |
| 5 | C – Information Seeking<br>A – Forwarding Link<br>O – Positive | 19 | C – Comment<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive |
| 6 | C – Sentiment – positive<br>A – Forwarding link<br>O – Positive | 20 | C – Sentiment - negative<br>A – Forwarding link<br>C – Information seeking<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive |
| 7 | C – Information seeking<br>A – Handling question<br>O - Positive | 21 | C – Comment<br>A – Casual conversation<br>O – Positive |
| 8 | C – Sentiment - positive<br>A – Request<br>C – Providing information<br>A – Casual conversation<br>O – Positive | 22 | C – Information seeking<br>A – Handling question<br>C – Positive + Information seeking<br>A – Forwarding Link<br>O – Positive |
| 9 | C – Sentiment - positive<br>A – Casual Conversation<br>O – Positive | 23 | C – Information seeking<br>A – Request<br>C – Information providing<br>A – Casual conversation<br>O – Positive |
| 10 | C – Information seeking<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive | 24 | C – Information seeking<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive |
| 11 | C – Sentiment - negative<br>A – Forwarding link<br>O – Positive<br>A – Causal conversation | 25 | C – Information seeking<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive |
| 12 | C – Information seeking<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive | 26 | C – Sentiment – negative<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive |
| 13 | C – Information seeking<br>A – Handling question<br>O – Positive | 27 | C – Sentiment – negative<br>A – Forwarding Link<br>O – Positive |

# Appendix C: Data Charts from Twitter Data

## Basic Data

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Customer Codes | | | | | | | |
| Sentiment - positive | 10 | 1 | 11 | 4 | 9 | 44 | 79 (13%) |
| Sentiment - negative | 44 | 17 | 52 | 44 | 60 | 22 | 239 (29.8%) |
| Information Seeking | 55 | 91 | 47 | 36 | 26 | 29 | 281 (46.8%) |
| Information providing | 8 | 19 | 19 | 30 | 24 | 13 | 113 (18.8%) |
| Comment | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 12 (2%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 44 | 22 | 7 | 5 | 21 | 12 | 111 (18.5%) |
| Forward Contact | 1 | 14 | 3 | 2 | 13 | 5 | 38 (6.3%) |
| Casual conversations | 20 | 4 | 47 | 13 | 10 | 47 | 141 (23.5%) |
| Handling questions | 40 | 59 | 43 | 30 | 19 | 25 | 216 (36%) |
| Confirmation | 0 | 3 | 0 | 26 | 37 | 12 | 78 (13%) |
| Request | 11 | 23 | 29 | 8 | 21 | 10 | 102 (17%) |
| Recommendations | 6 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 23 (3.8%) |
| Direct Messaging | 16 | 14 | 21 | 32 | 7 | 5 | 95(15.8%) |
| Outcome Codes | | | | | | | |
| Positive | 56 | 52 | 43 | 53 | 21 | 72 | 297 (49.5%) |
| Negative | 29 | 25 | 32 | 28 | 70 | 22 | 206 (34.3%) |
| Inconclusive | 15 | 23 | 25 | 19 | 9 | 6 | 97 (16.2%) |

**Conversations that start with POSITIVE SENTIMENT, classified by airline response**

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of positive sentiment convos | 8 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 9 | 43 | 73 |
| # ending in POSITIVE outcomes | 7 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 8* | 42 | 70 (95.9%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 2 | | | | | 1 | 3 (4.3%) |
| Forward Contact | | | | | | 1 | 1 (1.4%) |
| Casual conversations | 5 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 8 | 42 | 68 (97.1%) |
| Handling questions | 1 | | | | | | 1 (1.4%) |
| Confirmation | | | | | | | |
| Request | 1 | | 1 | | | | 2 (2.9%) |
| Recommendations | | | | | | | |
| Direct Messaging | | | | 1 | | | 1 (1.4%) |
| Inconclusive results | | | | | 1 | | 1 (1.4%) |

# Appendix C: Data Charts from Twitter Data

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of positive sentiment convos | 8 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 9 | 43 | 73 |
| # ending in NEGATIVE outcomes | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 (2.7%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | | | | | | | |
| Forward Contact | | | | | | | |
| Casual conversations | 1 | | | | | | 1 (50%) |
| Handling questions | 1 | | | | | 1 | 2 (100%) |
| Confirmation | | | | | | | |
| Request | | | | | | | |
| Recommendations | | | | | | | |
| Direct Messaging | | | | | | | |

**Conversations that start with NEGATIVE SENTIMENT, classified by airline response**

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of NEGATIVE sentiment convos | 41* | 14* | 48* | 39* | 51* | 21* | 214 |
| # ending in POSITIVE outcomes | 12 | 2 | 10 | 14 | 4 | 5 | 47 (22%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 7 | | | | | 2 | 9 (19.1%) |
| Forward Contact | | | | | 1 | | 1 (2%) |
| Casual conversations | 3 | 1 | 9 | 1 | | | 14 (29.8%) |
| Handling questions | 4 | | 2 | 2 | | | 8 (17 %) |
| Confirmation | | | | 9 | 1 | 2 | 12 (25.5%) |
| Request | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 9 (19.1%) |
| Recommendations | | | | | | 1 | 1 (2%) |
| Direct Messaging | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | | | 9 (19.1%) |
| Inconclusive results | *11 | *3 | *10 | *11 | *6 | *1 | 42 (19.6%) |

# Appendix C: Data Charts from Twitter Data

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of NEGATIVE sentiment convos | 41 | 14 | 48 | 39 | 51 | 21 | 214 |
| # ending in NEGATIVE outcomes | 18 | 9 | 28 | 14 | 41 | 15 | 125 (58.4%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 6 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 13 | 3 | 27 (21.6%) |
| Forward Contact | | 5 | 2 | | 6 | | 13 (10.4%) |
| Casual conversations | 4 | | 15 | 3 | | | 22 (17.6%) |
| Handling questions | 7 | 3 | 14 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 36 (28.8%) |
| Confirmation | | | | 5 | 19 | 5 | 29 (23.2%) |
| Request | 1 | 3 | 10 | 3 | 14 | 5 | 36 (28.8%) |
| Recommendations | 2 | 1 | 4 | | 2 | | 9 (7.2%) |
| Direct Messaging | 3 | | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 12 (9.6%) |

**Conversations that start with INFORMATION SEEKING, classified by airline response**

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of INFORMATION SEEKING conversations | 48 | 86 | 44 | 34 | 23 | 26 | 261 |
| # ending in POSITIVE outcomes | 33 | 49 | 25 | 26 | 8 | 21 | 162 (62.1%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 13 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 36 (22.6%) |
| Forward Contact | 1 | 3 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 8 (5%) |
| Casual conversations | 2 | | 2 | | 1 | 2 | 7 (4.3%) |
| Handling questions | 18 | 36 | 16 | 20 | 5 | 13 | 108 (66.7%) |
| Confirmation | | 2 | 1 | | | 1 | 4 (2.5%) |
| request | 3 | 4 | 5 | 2 | | | 14 (8.6%) |
| recommendations | 1 | 2 | 1 | | | 1 | 5 (3.1%) |
| Direct Messaging | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 25 (15.4%) |
| Inconclusive results | 5 | 21 | 15 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 47 (18%) |

# Appendix C: Data Charts from Twitter Data

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of INFORMATION SEEKING conversations | 48 | 86 | 44 | 34 | 23 | 26 | 261 |
| # ending in NEGATIVE outcomes | 10 | 16 | 4 | 6 | 13 | 3 | 52 (19.9%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 6 | 4 | | 2 | 3 | 1 | 16 (30.1%) |
| Forward Contact | | 2 | | | 5 | 1 | 8 (15.4%) |
| Casual conversations | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | | 4 (7.7%) |
| Handling questions | 6 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 29 (55.8%) |
| Confirmation | | | | | 3 | 2 | 5 (9.6%) |
| request | | 7 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 10 (19.2%) |
| recommendations | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 10 (19.2%) |
| Direct Messaging | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 (9.6%) |

**Conversations that start with INFORMATION PROVIDING, classified by airline response**

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of INFORMATION PROVIDING Sentiment convos | 2 | 2 | 2 | 20 | 15 | 8 | 49 |
| # ending in POSITIVE outcomes | 1 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 13 (26.5%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 1 | | | | | | 1 (7.6%) |
| Forward Contact | | | | | | | |
| Casual conversations | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | 3 (23.1%) |
| Handling questions | | | | 1 | | 1 | 2 (15.4%) |
| Confirmation | | | | 4 | | | 4 (30.1%) |
| Request | | | | 1 | | 1 | 2 (15.4%) |
| Recommendations | | | | 1 | 1 | | 2 (15.4%) |
| Direct Messaging | | | | 3 | | | 3 (23.1%) |
| Inconclusive results | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 10 (20.4%) |

# Appendix C: Data Charts from Twitter Data

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # of INFORMATION PROVIDING sentiment convos | 2 | 2 | 2 | 20 | 15 | 8 | 49 |
| # ending in NEGATIVE outcomes | 1 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 14 | 4 | 26 (53%) |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 1 | | | | 3 | 2 | 6 (23.1%) |
| Forward Contact | | 1 | | 1 | | | 2 (7.8%) |
| Casual conversations | | | | 1 | | | 1 (3.8%) |
| Handling questions | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | 2 | 6 (23.1%) |
| Confirmation | | | | 2 | 12 | 2 | 16 (61.5%) |
| Request | | | | 1 | 4 | | 5 (19.2%) |
| Recommendations | | | | 1 | | | 1 (3.8%) |
| Direct Messaging | | | | 1 | 2 | | 3 (11.5%) |

**Conversations classified by airline code and positive/negative outcomes**
**(*"Comment" coded conversations removed as they do not apply)**

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| POSITIVE outcomes | 56 | 52 | 43 | 53 | 21 | 72 | 297 |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 23 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 49 (16.5%) |
| Forward Contact | 1 | 3 | 1 | | 2 | 3 | 10 (3.4%) |
| Casual conversations | 11 | 2 | 20 | 6 | 9 | 44 | 92 (31%) |
| Handling questions | 23 | 36 | 18 | 23 | 5 | 14 | 119 (40%) |
| Confirmation | | 2 | 1 | 13 | 1 | 3 | 20 (6.7%) |
| request | 6 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 27 (9.1%) |
| recommendations | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 (2.7%) |
| Direct Messaging | 7 | 7 | 9 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 38 (12.8%) |
| Inconclusive results | 15 | 23 | 25 | 19 | 9 | 6 | 97(16.2%) |

## Appendix C: Data Charts from Twitter Data

| Airlines: | EasyJet | Ryanair | British Airways | Southwest | American | JetBlue | Total Conversations (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NEGATIVE outcomes | 29 | 25 | 32 | 28 | 70 | 22 | 206 |
| Airline Codes | | | | | | | |
| Forwarding Link | 13 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 19 | 6 | 49 (23.8%) |
| Forward Contact | | 8 | 2 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 23 (11.2%) |
| Casual conversations | 7 | 1 | 16 | 4 | | | 28 (13.6%) |
| Handling questions | 5 | 12 | 16 | 5 | 14 | 11 | 63 (30.6%) |
| Confirmation | | | | 7 | 34 | 9 | 50 (24.3%) |
| request | 1 | 10 | 11 | 5 | 18 | 6 | 51 (24.8%) |
| recommendations | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 5 | | 18 (8.7%) |
| Direct Messaging | 3 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 20 (9.7%) |

## Appendix D: Web Survey Questions

# Expectations of Airlines on Twitter

**1. Are you male or female?**

- [x] Male
- [x] Female

**2. What is your age?**

- [x] What is your age? 18 to 24
- [x] 25 to 34
- [x] 35 to 44
- [x] 45 to 54
- [x] 55 to 64
- [x] 65 to 74
- [x] 75 or older

**3. Question**

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would tweet an airline on Twitter with a QUESTION | [x] | [x] | [x] | [x] | [x] |
| I would expect an airline to respond to my QUESTION on Twitter | [x] | [x] | [x] | [x] | [x] |
| I would value a response from an airline to my QUESTION on Twitter | [x] | [x] | [x] | [x] | [x] |

## Appendix D: Web Survey Questions

**4. Complaint**

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would tweet an airline with a COMPLAINT on Twitter | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ |
| I would expect an airline to respond to my COMPLAINT on Twitter | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ |
| I would value a response from an airline to my COMPLAINT on Twitter | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ |

**5. Compliment**

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would tweet an airline with a COMPLIMENT on Twitter | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ |
| I would expect an airline to respond to my COMPLIMENT on Twitter | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ |
| I would value a response from an airline to my COMPLIMENT on Twitter | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ |

**6. I am more likely to expect a response from a traditional (not budget) airline on Twitter, vs a budget airline.**

☒ True

☒ False

## Appendix E: Web Survey Raw Data

**Total survey responses: 72**

### Demographic Data:

| Gender | |
|---|---|
| Male | 20 (27.78%) |
| Female | 52 (72.22%) |
| Total | 72 |

| Age | |
|---|---|
| 18-24 | 41 |
| 25-34 | 23 |
| 35-44 | 4 |
| 45-54 | 1 |
| 55-64 | 0 |
| 65-74 | 0 |
| 75+ | 3 |

**Question 3**

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **38.89%** | **20.83%** | **12.50%** | **18.06%** | **9.72%** | |
| **I would tweet an airline on Twitter with a QUESTION** | 28 | 15 | 9 | 13 | 7 | 72 |
| | **15.28%** | **9.72%** | **20.83%** | **33.33%** | **20.83%** | |
| **I would expect an airline to respond to my QUESTION on Twitter** | 11 | 7 | 15 | 24 | 15 | 72 |
| | **9.72%** | **4.17%** | **4.17%** | **45.83%** | **36.11%** | |
| **I would value a response from an airline to my QUESTION on Twitter** | 7 | 3 | 3 | 33 | 26 | 72 |

## Appendix E: Web Survey Raw Data

### Question 4

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **27.78%** | **23.61%** | **13.89%** | **25.00%** | **9.72%** | |
| **I would tweet an airline with a COMPLAINT on Twitter** | 20 | 17 | 10 | 18 | 7 | 72 |
| | **13.89%** | **15.28%** | **19.44%** | **30.56%** | **20.83%** | |
| **I would expect an airline to respond to my COMPLAINT on Twitter** | 10 | 11 | 14 | 22 | 15 | 72 |
| | **15.28%** | **4.17%** | **16.67%** | **40.28%** | **23.61%** | |
| **I would value a response from an airline to my COMPLAINT on Twitter** | 11 | 3 | 12 | 29 | 17 | 72 |

### Question 5:

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **26.39%** | **13.89%** | **18.06%** | **26.39%** | **15.28%** | |
| **I would tweet an airline with a COMPLIMENT on Twitter** | 19 | 10 | 13 | 19 | 11 | 72 |
| | **13.89%** | **20.83%** | **30.56%** | **26.39%** | **8.33%** | |
| **I would expect an airline to respond to my COMPLIMENT on Twitter** | 10 | 15 | 22 | 19 | 6 | 72 |
| | **12.50%** | **5.56%** | **25.00%** | **40.28%** | **16.67%** | |
| **I would value a response from an airline to my COMPLIMENT on Twitter** | 9 | 4 | 18 | 29 | 12 | 72 |

## Appendix E: Web Survey Raw Data

### Question 6

**I am more likely to expect a response from a traditional (not budget) airline on Twitter, vs a budget airline.**

| Answer Choices | Responses |
|---|---|
| **TRUE** | **43.06%** |
| | 31 |
| **FALSE** | **56.94%** |
| | 41 |
| **Total** | **72** |

**All respondents to agree/strongly agree to Tweeting a question, complaint, or compliment**

| **Question** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total |
| Tweet | | | 20 (27.8%) |
| Expect Response | 7 (35%) | 10 (50%) | 17 (85%) |
| Value Response | 6 (30%) | 14 (70%) | 20 (100%) |
| **Complaint** | | | |
| | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total |
| Tweet | | | 25 (34.7%) |
| Expect Response | 7 (28%) | 12 (48%) | 19 (76%) |
| Value Response | 9 (36%) | 13 (52%) | 22 (88%) |
| **Compliment** | | | |
| | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total |
| Tweet | | | 30 (41.7%) |
| Expect Response | 13 (43.3%) | 4 (13.3%) | 17 (56.7%) |
| Value Response | 19 (63.3%) | 9 (30%) | 28 (93.3%) |

# Appendix F: Specific Airline Brand Information

**Easy Jet**

EasyJet airlines is a British based budget airline company that operates throughout many European destinations that was established in 1995 (easyjet.com, 2015). Currently EasyJet operates over 600 routes in over 30 countries and employs more than 8,000 people (easyjet.com, 2015). In 2014, EasyJet flew over 60 million passengers (easyjet.com, 2015)

EasyJet was founded on the idea of creating a low cost budget airline with a focus on customer service (easyjet.com, 2015). EasyJet has a similar business model to that of both RyanAir and Southwest Airlines with a focus on cost-cutting and customer service (easyjet.com, 2015). However, EasyJet differs from RyanAir in that EasyJet flies to primary airports, whereas RyanAir tends to fly to secondary low cost airports. EasyJet began being active on Twitter in 2009.

**RyanAir**

RyanAir is a low cost budget airline that was founded in 1985 and is headquarters are located in Ireland (Ryanair.com, 2015). Currently Ryanair operates 180 destinations around Europe and has a focus on remaining low cost, no frills, and aims to be very reliable (Ryanair.com).

In 2013, RyanAir did a complete overhaul and updated their marketing campaign, leading to many changes, most notably this is when the company joined Twitter (Lundgren and Doyle, 2013). Also at this time the website was redone and a free mobile application was introduced in an attempt to become more competitive among budget airlines and increase the level of customer service (Lundgren and Doyle, 2013).

**British Airways**

British Airways is a legacy or traditional airline founded in 1974 in Britain (britishairways.com, 2015). Currently British Airways is the second largest carrier in Britain based on passengers second only to EasyJet (Britishairways.com, 2015). Based in London, British Airways has destinations in 70 countries and carries more than 40 million customers a year (britishairways.com, 2015). British Airways joined Twitter in 2009 as a way to enhance the brand and interact with consumers.

**American Airlines**

American Airlines is a major airline based in the United State of America operating both domestically and internationally. American Airlines, founded in 1930, is a large legacy or traditional airline (aa.com, 2015). This airline has 273 destinations worldwide and also has partnerships with many other international airline carriers to offer consumers many options and choice in travel (aa.com, 2015). In 2011, American Airlines corporation filed for bankruptcy and began a restructuring plan, including looking at mergers with other airlines (aa.com, 2015). In 2013, American Airlines and US Airways announced a merger of the two companies created the largest airline in the world, this will remain under the brand name

of American Airlines (aa.com, 2015). While this merger was initially the topic of much political debate, due to the size of the company with this merger, the merger became official in April 2015 (aa.com, 2015). American Airlines joined Twitter in 2009.

**JetBlue**

JetBlue, established in 1998, is an American low cost, budget airline that is headquartered in New York, USA (jetblue.com, 2015). JetBlue currently operates destinations to 24 states in the USA and 12 countries in the Caribbean, South America, and Latin America (jetblue.com. 2015). Many of the executive's for JetBlue are former Southwest airline employees, and JetBlue initially started out by following a similar model of that of Southwest, offering low-cost airfare (jetblue.com, 2015). JetBlue also set themselves apart from other low cost airlines by offering amenities that other low cost airlines do not offer, recently, JetBlue has started offering free inflight Wi-Fi to their passengers (jetblue.com, 2015).

JetBlue began its business Twitter page in 2007 and has a team specifically devoted to Twitter responses, which is made up very largely of stay at home moms who can work from anywhere (Piazza, 2014). JetBlue initially decided to have a social media team in 2010, the first airline to devote an entire team exclusively to social media (Piazza, 2014). JetBlue is highly regarded for their social media strategy that has a distinct focus on engaging with consumers in any way possible. JetBlue also has a focus on keeping their Twitter feed personal for each consumer and practices "smart engagement", working to add something to the conversation each time the brand engages with consumers (Piazza, 2014). Also, JetBlue has a goal response time to Twitter engagement of under 10 minutes, although it is often less than this (Piazza, 2014).

**Southwest Airlines**

Southwest Airlines is a major United States airline and is the world's largest low-cost carrier (southwest.com, 2015). Southwest Airlines was established in 1967 and currently has 46,000 employees operating to 93 destinations mainly in the United States (southwest.com, 2015). Southwest is often the model for other low cost airlines to follow as they remain a highly successful and profitable brand (southwest.com, 2015). Southwest Airlines joined Twitter in 2007 (southwest.com, 2015). The social media strategy for Southwest Airlines was highlighted in depth in section 2.2.