Social Media and the Church: A Systematic Literature Review
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ABSTRACT
With the introduction of social media and web 2.0, churches are increasingly searching for new ways to spread their beliefs and build and sustain active communities. This paper presents the outcomes of published work, by performing a systematic literature review. Therefore, this paper will give an overview of key findings and the results that have been found during previous research. Furthermore it gives a clear view of the current progression in this field. Given the outcomes we reveal a research gap. This paper will be useful for other scholars who want to address this subject and need a status quo of the research that has already been carried out. Although there has been little attention to this subject during the last few years, we systematically selected 29 highly relevant pieces of literature. The results within the literature show that some practices are more successful than others. Also it looks like certain critical success factors are influencing their outcomes. The results also show major limits to the conducted research and explain why most researchers use conceptual research and case studies as their research method. Furthermore this paper gives some general recommendations for future research, in order to acquire more empirical data.

Keywords
Social media, Church, Web 2.0, Internet, Social Internet

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1 Context
The internet is a growing source of information and knowledge for everyone, especially young people [22], because it makes information available very fast. With the introduction of social media and web 2.0 it has also become a place to communicate, present yourself to the world and bond with each other. It is important to note that internet, web 2.0 and social media cannot be completely seen as separate from each other. They are strongly related to each other. In 1998 the first “weblog” was created by Bruce and Susan Abelson, called “Open Diary”.

“Web 2.0 is a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion.”[15] Web 2.0 is the platform for the evolution of social media by using the internet as an online publishing platform, according to Kaplan and Haenlein [15].

“Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”, whereby “User Generated Content (UGC) can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of Social Media.” [15] All these concepts are based on each other and utilize each other in order to work properly. They aren’t totally different things but purely successor steps in internet evolution.

While almost every organization is already using the internet to present itself to the world, non-profit organizations are still struggling to find ways to use social media to their advantage [26]. While a vast amount of research has been conducted to address this problem, little research is conducted in regard to the use of social media by churches. The research that has been conducted is scattered across a large area and there is no central place or paper that presents this information in an organized way. Because of this lack of “body of knowledge” and consequently, hard data, it is difficult for researchers to start a new study and even more difficult for churches to learn how to use social media to build and sustain their communities. This is why more future research is necessary, according to Oenes [18].

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions
Without sufficient knowledge about critical success factors it is very hard to start new practices. This is exactly the problem churches are facing at the moment. They do not have sufficient knowledge about social media and its use for church participation and sustaining, while more and more people are using social media every day.

Today we face a society interconnected by small computers, of which the numbers of users is growing fast. Especially young people use these technologies in order to stay in contact with each other [22]. A church is a place in which people can share their thoughts and beliefs with each other. Therefore it is very important that many people participate in sharing these thoughts and beliefs with others. But due to the increasing digitalization in our networked world, more and more communication is becoming indirect. People are increasingly communicating online.

Churches need new practices to fit with this trend in order to keep stimulating the religious discussion. This is why the following question is formulated: Are there universal critical success factors, contributing greatly to the success of religious social media practices?
In order to answer this question, underlying questions have to be addressed as well:

- Can previous literature be categorized, based on research method?
- What were the outcomes of this research?
- What are the major limitations from this available research and what are general recommendations for future research?
- Can we recognize critical success factors?

The answers to these questions will provide a categorized overview of existing research and an overview of practices that are found successful in the past. They will help us find out if there are critical success factors related to them. This is the goal of the research.

1.3 Overview of The Paper
The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Chapter two will further clarify the research method that has been used and in chapter three the results of this research will be shown. Finally, in chapter four, the results and the limitations of this research will be discussed. Also suggestions for further research will be presented.

2. RESEARCH METHOD
The research method is primarily based on a systematic literature review. We have chosen for this method, because we want an overview of what is known at the moment, in order to stimulate and speed up future research.

Systematically searching databases was the first step of this research. This was conducted by searching databases provided by the University of Twente and databases and sites provided by and discussed with my supervisor. The literature search was carried out in the first three weeks of the literature analysis process.

The second step of the research was to determine how many publications were done and what kind of research methods were used. Different research and their outcomes were compared in order to find differences and similarities between them. We also tried to find out in which specific areas of research methods further research will be required. This was done by searching different databases with different queries. The databases and queries used are shown in Appendix A, which will be discussed later in this paper.

During the third step we tried to find at what kind of limitations emerged when previous research was conducted. After finding these limitations and describing them, we tried to give general recommendations for future research to be more successful.

The last step of our research included finding critical success factors. We did this by carefully analyzing successful practices in the literature we found and carefully analyzing which factors contributed to this success.

The analysis of the literature we found was done by starting with carefully reading abstracts, introductions and conclusions. We then were able to determine the nature and outcomes of the literature. Then we started reading all selected literature, starting with the items that seemed most promising. During the reading all literature was numbered and the key findings mentioned in them were written down in a document.

### Table 1. Literature review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search query</th>
<th>Total results</th>
<th>Total selected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;social media&quot; AND &quot;church&quot;</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;social internet&quot; AND &quot;church&quot;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;social web&quot; AND &quot;church&quot;</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;user generated content&quot; AND &quot;church&quot;</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;web 2.0&quot; AND &quot;church&quot;</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;crowd sourcing&quot; AND &quot;church&quot;</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;internet&quot; AND &quot;church&quot;</td>
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<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other literature</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>1395</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. RESULTS

3.1 Previous Research Categorized

We will now look if the selected literature can be categorized. The reason we do this is because we want to know what kinds of research have been conducted more than others and what kinds of research have been conducted only a little, or even haven’t been conducted yet. This will help us determine suggestions for further research. We will categorize the previous research by research method, because most research conducted is still of explorative nature because there is a lack of empirical data. Therefore most research is descriptive and that is why we think categorizing research approaches is less relevant at the moment. Another important aspect is that ten pieces of literature are not directly related to religious approaches in regard to social media. For example some materials are about the use of Facebook and other social media [19] and directly related to religious social media. This kind of articles help us understand the context. We excluded these materials when we categorized all the materials. In order to categorize in a structured way we used a paper from Folmer et al. [8]. It describes which different research methods can be distinguished. Table 2 shows the different research methods and describes them.

Table 2. Different Research Methods¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>No strong empirical evidence. Description of current practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis/survey/experiments</td>
<td>Mail survey, online survey, interviews etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Literature review, practice review etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Methods, frameworks, techniques etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Intensive analysis of cases based upon interviews etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Ethnography, action research etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By carefully analyzing the materials we were able to categorize the previously conducted research, as shown in table 3.

Table 3. Categorized existing literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Number of articles and books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis/survey/experiments</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong>:</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Table structure is based on Folmer et al. [8]

We found that 74 percent of the research is conducted by performing case studies and conceptual research. A side note we have to make is that some research is a combination of the two, but we picked the method which most resembled it. These findings support earlier findings, namely that there exists a lack of empirical studies. Most research available in international literature is of an explorative and descriptive nature. We think this is why most previous research is conceptual research and case studies. Researchers try to collect data by developing theories, concepts and models (6 times), before testing them extensively in empirical studies. This will make collecting data easier in the future. Also researchers have started to just look at cases in religious social media (8 times) in an attempt to see resemblance and patterns.

As soon as more data is available due to more research and more patterns are found in different cases, we expect that there will be more data analysis research. This research will then provide us with more concrete and empirical information, which is needed to prove certain theories. By then we expect the first review research to start as well. We therefore recommend more conceptual research and case studies who will provide more information needed for data analysis research.

3.2 Conducted Research

Different research has been conducted to find out to what extend social media and internet should be used to support community building and online participation [12][28][17]. This research takes different forms and is aimed at different practices, but ultimately share the same goal as mentioned above. We will now look deeper into the conducted research and present the major outcomes. We will do this by examining all research one by one and stating the most important aspects and findings.

We were able to find 29 items of literature regarding this subject. Nineteen of them were directly related to social media and the church. Most literature is written about the church and its struggle to adapt in the new digital age. Therefore, terms like “social internet” and “the wired church 2.0” [29] are used more commonly then “social media”. Although the term “social media” is not used broadly yet in the literature we found it is still valuable to address related terms, because all the terms hold much in common, as mentioned before. Some terms might just be broader than social media alone, like Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is the technological foundation that enables internet-based applications to create and exchange User Generated Content [15]. This is why social media relies heavily on the concept of web 2.0 [7].

3.2.1 Role of Social Media

Hutchins [12] found that while social media can play an important role in community building and sustaining and giving churches more access to internet it will not replace existing channels of communication. While blogging and posting pictures and texts online improves communication on a daily basis, personal contact with community members is still very important. Webb [28] supports this with her research. After interviewing 1056 church leaders, she found out that social media plays a big role in attracting and sustaining new members, however social media alone is not enough. Michels [17] concludes after intensively following and interviewing a pastor that social media and internet can be great tools for preparing churchgoers for sermons and meetings.
3.2.2 Use of Religious Social Media

If the practices we just mentioned are to be implemented, it is important to determine how people are using the internet and why they are using it. Campbell [3] argues that for religious social media to be effective it will need to become domestic first, like the telephone. If that happens, social media can be a perfect religious tool for building and sustaining active communities by providing a religious network, a place for worshipping, providing religious identity and serve as a missionary tool to attract potential new community members.

Teusner [26] supports these findings with a case study. After monitoring 35 religious blogs he found out that bloggers see social media as an opportunity to explore other communities, share beliefs and religious symbols with other believers and share their opinion about religious matters with others. Additionally these bloggers try to include non-religious people by using common words in their discussions. Cheong et al. [5] also studied religious blogs and revealed relevant results. They studied 200 religious blogs and found five themes bloggers mainly use to talk about. Personal religion, didactical content, criticism and personal issues related to faith, news and information and coordination of practices. These findings show that religious blogs provide an opportunity for many different discussions, learning and information sharing. Also blogs have a potential downside. If bloggers become too personal they might encounter negative response to their blogs, because blogs can be read by a lot of different people with different cultural backgrounds. These people might interpret blogs in another way the blogger meant them. So caution is required, argued by Wang et al. [27].

Also, Savage [23] found that blogs and tweets are useful for predicting flu outbreaks and earthquakes, because people notice things and blog them. Maybe it is possible for churches to do such a thing as well. They could use blogs and tweets to find out what problems occur within their communities.

3.2.3 Religious Social Media Practices

Four different researches conducted claim that the use of social media and internet by churches has not occurred undetected. Hutchins [13] says the following about this: “Online churches have attracted considerable scholarly and popular attention over the last two decades, featuring in new media research, journalism and Christian commentary, but their significance for participants remains largely unexplored. Academic studies of these churches have so far relied on short-term research and addressed a limited set of concerns, dealing almost exclusively with ritual forms in virtual worlds.”

Although large parts remain unexplored there are also a number of practices that have been explored by research and case studies. These practices are studied by Hutchins [11][13], Radde-Antweiler [21] and Jenkins [14]. According them they are examples of good practices. We will now look at these different practices and their outcomes.

The first practice mentioned by Hutchins [13] and Radde-Antweiler [21] is the I-church. This is an online environment in which participants can form pastoral groups like in physical churches. These groups are led by a group leader. Discussions take place on interactive online forums that are supported by pictures and movies. Recently the forums have been opened for all interested people and the number of participants is growing fast.

The second practice is the “Church of Fools”, which has been studied more intensively by Jenkins [14]. The project started as “The Ark”. Twelve people, some of them were social workers and a priest, were placed in a virtual world as virtual characters. These people were then allowed to discuss and listen to each other. Soon, strong emotional interaction developed between the participants and church services were held spontaneously at Sundays. Then the idea rose, to develop a church on Second Life, in which online characters could meet each other and visit services. To attract people the church was built in a style people resemble from the real world. Soon the online church became a success and the number of participants increased fast. In 2007 the church went temporary offline, yet it is available again as “St. Pixels”.

The third practice is the “Cathedral of Second Life”. This is another church within the virtual world Second life, which has been studied by Hutchins [11]. Virtual worlds allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content and are therefore social media [15]. She found out that while people are religiously active in virtual worlds, they still hold on to offline forms such liturgies and lightning candles. This virtual church has an organization and a liturgy similar to the ones used in the offline world. Also the church looks visually like an offline church. As a result, much of the visitors are people that are used to visiting a similar church in the real world. Although a lot of people feel attracted to this kind of churches because they “feel” the same, it is hard to attract outsiders. In order to attract them a more open and church is needed, that does not directly resembles an offline church. It is important to specify which goal you want to achieve by creating an online church. Is it missionary work or attracting people that go to a similar church in real life?

The final example given the literature is the “Church online”, that is also known as Live.lifchurch.tv. This is an enormous online campus that is supported by different media and is visit by a large scale of religious followers. The site is linked to Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. This allows users to invite new people by using other social media. Users have the opportunity to chat in different chat rooms and forums and can also download movies and music for usage in their own churches. However this example has the most visitors compared to the other practices, it is mainly visited by people that already go to churches and need some extra information or want a good discussion. Thus, this practice is a good initiative to provide religious users with a source of extra information and worshipping. However it is not very useful for churches that wish to expand their community by attracting new members. In order to do this a more open environment is needed.

Hutchins concludes his article by arguing that there are two important choices churches will have to make while developing social media initiatives. Firstly, a choice between “Familiarity” and “Difference”. Secondly, a choice between “Integration” and “Isolation”. Do you want do reproduce offline activities or create new ones and do you want to use your own (church)name or do you want a more impersonal environment?

3.2.4 Linking Offline and Online Religion

There has also been research conducted to determine to what extent online and offline religious life are linked to each other and how this linkage impacts both offline and online religious life. Campbell [2] found that online activities are mainly the consequence of the changing offline life. Offline life is becoming more and more networked due to the technological inventions and improvements. Due to the shift from communities to personal religion, people require a more and more networked life to keep sharing their believes with other
religious people. There is a potential danger in these shifting religious lives. Less people are going to the church to be together as a community in a physical way. Campbell recognizes this decrease in church visits as a potential downside of these new developments. Others argue that while online religious life is growing fast, this is no threat to offline religion. Stewart [25] found in her research that offline and online religion are closely linked to each other and do not exclude each other. After studying the online activities of several religious women she found out that the texts they placed on social media sites was always linked somehow to their personal church life. Stewart argues that people take the experiences they have from their own offline church life and use these experiences to inform other online. Online and offline religious life do not substitute but complement each other.

A third view is provided by Ploeger et al. [20]. Their research concludes that strong online relationships can stimulate offline activities. These offline activities will otherwise never occur, because they are not stimulated in the offline world. For example a person who never goes to church nor has religious friends, can be stimulated to go to church by online religious friends this person has strong relational ties with.

3.2.5 Design
Others did more research to the design of social media and its allocation in order to be effective. A more or less general conclusion states that the use of several different media leads to a more “multisensory environment”. This environment contributes highly to religious social media, according to Heidbrink et al. [9]. Their research shows that in contrast with normal internet users, religious users mainly want more in-depth and visual information. This can be very well provided by pictures symbols, videos etc. In addition Rupp et al. [22] state that this leads to the attraction of target group that is otherwise very difficult to attract to the church, namely the youth.

Chen [4] found that the Mormons make very effective use of digital media by using an intrusive strategy. The key to their success is the usage of large amount of key-terms which are spread all over various social media sites. These terms link directly or indirectly to the Mormons main site. The Mormons see these key term links as a very important aspect in spreading their beliefs and attracting others to their cause. Howard [10] supports this view by arguing that is very important to link social media with other websites. This helps increasing online presence. People tend to associate a large online presence with professionalism and recognition.

3.2.6 Books About Religious Social Media
There are also some books written about social media design and the best ways to use social media in order to provide an interactive environment. Drescher [6] states some interesting things in her book “Tweet if you love Jesus”. First she states that a good blog is a blog that reacts on another blogs. A good blogger does not tell about himself or herself alone, but tries to respond to other bloggers. After posting a tweet, try to follow other bloggers also. Good blogs are focussed on providing constructive information that helps the discussion.

Second, Twitter and Facebook work differently according to Drescher. Facebook is more open to strangers and helps attracting new people more easily then Twitter. Nevertheless she states that both Facebook and Twitter can be used to attract new people to your church. When doing this, it is very important to act thankful. Try to ask people constructive questions instead of posting negative reactions. A third insight from Drescher’s work is that while doing missionary work, by using social media, it is more important to spread feelings and habits related to religion. While messages are not appropriate to spread feelings, it is better to use a large scale of different media like pictures and videos.

Finally she describes that it is important to design an attractive layout for your social media site. This layout needs to attract the group you have in mind. For example if you try to attract young girls, use a lot of pink. Also the usage of so called “meta-tags” is very useful. People searching on Google for example will see an attractive text instead of just and URL. Also the message you want to spread needs to be consistent. This helps developing some kind of “brand” that helps attracting people. She concludes with the statement that social media cannot be used to substitute the physical church, because an active physical community is needed.

Sterling and Zimmerman [24] found that when using a user-centered approach, which social media do, spirituality has to be considered as much as gender, location and age for example. While a lot social media consider these variables, far less attention has been given to spirituality as a factor. This makes incorporating social media in churches difficult.

3.3 Limitations and General Recommendations
As stated before, research to this subject is still in its infancy and there is a research gap. Without knowledge of social media in regard to the church, it is very hard for them to start using new practices to attract and sustain (new) members. This is why it is essential to conduct future research [18]. The remainder of this section will look into the key limitations of the already conducted research and will give some general recommendations for future research.

3.3.1 Comparing Practices
One of the problems about conducting research to this subject is the fact that the different practices are very difficult to compare. Because there is no general way to present your church or community online due to the enormous amount of possibilities on the internet it is very difficult to distinguish differences and similarities between practices [13]. Therefore it is hard for researchers rely on existing insights from literature in this field. A good thing to start with is therefore the development of a research template. This template should help to distinguish different practices and relate them to each other. This could be done within different groups. For example, Tweets used in Twitter aren’t that different from the small “status blogs” within Facebook. By “cutting” different social media practices into different modules and grouping them, we think it will be easier for researchers to compare social media practices and write consistent conclusions about them.

3.3.2 Different Views
Difference in view from practice is another problem. More and more churches are starting to use online practices to represent themselves, but all those churches and communities have another point of view about those practices. It is in the very nature of religion that it is unique for every practitioner and therefore every practitioner perceives the practices in another way. Because of this fact it is very hard to properly interview users and leaders within communities. Also the different age groups have a great impact. While the main group of churches and religious communities wants to address is the younger population [22], it is still important to keep other age groups in
mind, because new practices may also affect them in positive or negative ways.

For future research to cope with this, it is important to keep in mind that a lot of different people need to be interviewed before you can say something relevant about social media practices. In practice this means that different age groups need to be interviewed, but also different religious groups. While Catholics might like the usage of a lot of symbols and statues on social media sites, Protestants might not like this and even avoid the sites. This is because different religious groups have different practices and relate these practices to objects online.

So in order to get a realistic view about different social media practices it is important to take a large and diverse sample group to work with and to strongly take in mind that these people are all driven by different offline practices, which they will relate to online practices [25].

3.3.3 Turbulent Environment

The third problem we found in literature is that the environment around social media sites is very turbulent. This is because the internet and all the related practices are being developed rapidly the last years. What might be “in” today might be “out” tomorrow. The limitation we acknowledge today is that very few researchers are conducting research to this subject and new research initiatives are hard to develop. To solve this problem a larger and more active research community has to be formed around this matter. In this case researchers can build on each others findings.

Besides that it is also important to study related research areas/fields. Although non-religious organizations might have other intentions with social media practices, they might still provide understanding how to attract people to their sites, or they might even confirm best practices found while researching religious social media practices. For example this related research confirms the fact that for text to be interesting, it needs to be supported by pictures, videos, music etc. [16].

3.4 Universal Critical Success Factors

Although the research to this subject is still in its infancy we think we can already distinguish some critical factors that can either influence practices in a very positive or negative manner. We will discuss these critical factors in this chapter.

One factor that was mentioned as a critical success factor is the usage if different media types when trying to send a message to users. For example, Hutchins [13] supports this idea. Because religion is experienced differently by every person and every person is touched by different kinds of media it is good to offer a diverse set of media. Also pictures and video’s can display symbols, while text cant and music can offer means to express a feeling more easily. Also these different media support each other and help telling a complete story. So we would recommend churches to offer a diverse set of media.

Another recommendation we want to make is about the attitudes churches have to develop when they are engaging in social media. Bach [1] says the following about this: “Trust, resources for activities, and relationships are key factors for social capital of high quality”

So always keep in mind that a negative or non-constructive attitude will oppose a good discussion and will scare people away. Drescher [6] and many others urge to use a positive attitude while using social media. It is also a good practice to show your users how you would like them to participate in your social media. Positive attitude will provide a social and safe environment for people to express their deepest feelings and their believes to others. Only then, other users will be able to help people and provide information about their believes and feelings. This will lead to good conversations between people, which eventually is the goal of religious social media. People will talk about the safe environment and this will attract new users also.

Church leaders, pastors and other church workers should actively participate in the social media provided by the church, because they can provide extra information and use information gained from discussions to do their work even better. Active participation in social media will make the users believe that the church listens to them. This will provide trust in the relationship.

Also social media can be used to start online pastoral groups and other support groups, when people aren’t able to attend these physically. But be aware, church workers, leaders and pastors need be trained and instructed well before they start to participate. If they are not in sync with the message the church wants to spread, they may cause confusion or even anger people. This is why they have to meet regularly to share their experiences.

A negative critical factor is social media to substitute the physical church life, like pastoral groups and sermons. This happens when social media is used wrong. Hutchins [12] and Webb [28] advise us to be cautious and state that social media will never be able to substitute offline church life and should therefore be used to make people curious and attract them to attend offline church sermons etc.

So the key is to always keep in mind, what message you want to provide online. Always share enough to make people interested and willing to participate actively in the discussion but provide just enough to also keep them curious.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Conclusion

Religious social media is still in its infancy and it will take some years to grow to adulthood. During our research we found that there is a growing amount of research conducted on this subject.

Yet lot of current research is still limited in its approach, because there is a lack of empirical data at the moment. Research is primarily conducted to gain this empirical data. This is done in conceptual research and case studies mainly. It will take time for more data to be gained.

We also found that there are limitations regarding the research that was conducted in this area. Researching religious social media is difficult because cases are hard to compare. There are multiple and conflicting views from various religious groups. Also, the environment around social media and internet changes very fast.

Although data is limited and few research has been conducted there are already some critical success factors to be found. We have summarized these critical success factors in table 4 on the next page. This table also provides a general description for the implementation of these critical success factors.

Churches and religious organizations should debate about these critical success factors carefully in order to build a consistent and attractive religious social media practice. They should also try to involve their church workers in this process in order to build a consistent attitude.
Table 4. Critical success factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical success factor</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usage of different media types.</td>
<td>Use video’s and pictures to represent symbols etc. Use music to express feelings etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive and positive attitude.</td>
<td>Offer constructive and positive feedback to stimulate discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active participation from church workers.</td>
<td>Provide extra information for discussions and gain extra information from discussions to perform better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitutability</td>
<td>Share just enough information to make people curious.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Limitations
The largest limitation of this research is time capacity. Given the research period it was not possible to search every existing database and using more queries. Therefore, we tried to find and select the most appropriate databases and search for the most relevant queries. However, there still are more sources to be explored. For example, we became aware of the Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet Online in our research process. This journal specializes in research about religion online. This was not taking into account at the start of our research. Probably there are more of these sources to be found and these should be found in future research. Another limitation of this study is that we only searched for English literature in international databases, while there may also be German or Spanish literature about this subject for example.

The final limitation is the availability of the literature found. Although we could retrieve most items, two of them remained unavailable. One item could only be ordered with a special license and another was only available overseas. We did not have the budget to get the license or make a special order to get the item overseas.

4.3 Suggestions for Future Research
For future research to be effective, we suggest to take the conclusions we made in this paper into account for new research. Also, we suggest that more conceptual research and case studies should be carried out by scholars. These kind of studies can increase the body of knowledge regarding social media and the church.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
A special thanks to Robin Effing for supervising the process and providing important extra information.

6. REFERENCES


## APPENDIX

### A. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW TABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Id</th>
<th>Search query</th>
<th>Web of science results</th>
<th>Web of science selected</th>
<th>Scopus results</th>
<th>Scopus selected</th>
<th>Inspect results (ESGC)</th>
<th>Inspect (ESGC) selected</th>
<th>Google Scholar</th>
<th>Google Scholar selected</th>
<th>ACM selected</th>
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<th>Taylor &amp; Francis Online selected</th>
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<th>Total selected</th>
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Figure 1. Systematic literature review table