The Impact of Social Media on the Integration Process of Refugees in Austria

Master Thesis
to obtain the academic degree of
Master of Science
in the Master's Program
General Management
STATUTORY DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted is my own unaided work, that I have not used other than the sources indicated, and that all direct and indirect sources are acknowledged as references.
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Linz, May 31, 2019

[Signature]
Executive Summary

The refugee movements to Austria in the years around 2015 have led to considerable challenges in the integration of the newcomers into the Austrian society, which affect refugees, policy makers, NGOs as well as society in general. In the last decade, social media has evolved to a technological form of communication that facilitates our lives in several ways, and one group that especially benefits from these developments are refugees. The aim of this study is to describe and expand the knowledge base in the overlapping research fields of integration and social media and to find out how social media affects the integration process of refugees in Austria. For this, more than 2500 posts in six different informal refugee networks in Facebook were analyzed. Statements of refugees in initial interviews indicated that these networks are the most commonly used form of social media for gathering information. The analyzed posts were assigned to thematic categories, resulting in an overview of the topics of discussion in these informal networks. Under application of a framework of the core domains of integration, the impact of social media was then evaluated in the different areas that are of special relevance in refugees’ integration process. The study shows that informal networks in Facebook have a very positive impact on the language learning possibilities of refugees and on their ability to obtain information about important institutions in Austria, which often fail to reach this audience via their official websites. Further areas where refugees’ integration process is facilitated through social media are employment and housing, as well as education and health to a minor extent. In terms of safety and stability, a rather negative impact was indicated. These informal refugee networks are badly plagued by spam posts, which negatively affect the credibility of the overall given information and make the utilization of such networks more arduous. Thus, the positive effect of social media on refugee integration is diminished by spam posts. Based on this knowledge and on the personal perception of the dynamics in informal refugee networks in Facebook, a concept was finally recommended, which should advise policy makers or NGOs in better utilizing the potential of social media to positively affect refugee integration.
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1. Introduction

When people debate about integration, they do not necessarily mean the same. In fact, the term is used with widely differing meanings, what significantly impedes the debate about what constitutes successful integration (Ager & Strang 2008, 166). As Robinson (1998, 118) phrases, "integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most."

The enormous numbers of asylum applications in the recent years in Europe, that had its peak in 2015 with more than 1,300,000 applications across the EU-28 States, lead to a great challenge for the European Union to integrate the newcomers. With respect to the movements of refugees fleeing to Europe, mainly for reasons of war and conflicts in their home countries, it is commonly spoken of an asylum "crisis". Scholten & van Nispen (2015, 3) argue that the massive refugee flows have led to a growing sense that the European Union failed to predict these movements and provide support for the refugees quickly and effectively. According to them, the crisis has shown the lack of cohesion within the European Union with respect to integration policies and programs and it has also reinforced the rising nationalist sentiment in many of its member countries, which in turn complicate the elaboration of a unified solution to handle the refugee movements and to integrate the newcomers successfully.

![Figure 1: Asylum applications in Europe (left) and Austria (right) (2006-2017) (Eurostat 2018; Statistik Austria 2018)](image)

Along with globalization and the increased movement of goods and people, digitalization and technological improvements have happened with enormous speed in the recent decades. Achievements in these areas have led to new possibilities for people to simplify their lives. Social media can be named as an example of such achievements, which brought humanity opportunities that have not been there before, especially in terms of connecting with others around the globe. Refugees, people who flee from their home country for reasons of war, persecution or other, in order to find a better place to live, are especially affected by technological improvements like social media. If and how this specific group of people can utilize social media to orientate themselves in their new environment and how it affects their integration process will be the main issue in this thesis. It must be mentioned at the beginning that the term "integration process" is frequently used,
even though integration is not a process in the narrow sense. A process typically has a defined beginning and an ending, but integration obviously does not, even though people tend to say that at some point someone is “fully” integrated.

It will be shown in this thesis which social media platforms are used in practice by refugees, for which issues they are used and if and how these tools could be improved in order to benefit refugees even more. In the course of this study, more than 2,500 posts from various Facebook groups were analyzed and assigned to different categories, according to their content. The results were then used under application of a framework by Ager and Strang (2008) to evaluate the relevance of social media in different domains of integration. Recommendations will be provided, how policy makers or Non-Governmental Organizations could effectively and efficiently utilize the potential of social media as a powerful tool in order to enhance the integration process of thousands of new members in our society. The focus will be on refugees in Austria, but under consideration of factors like technological infrastructure and culturally dominant attitude towards migration, the main findings can be applied beyond the national borders and the recommended concept can be implemented in other countries as well.
2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. Integration

Integration is a highly controversial and much disputed subject within the field of migration. It depends on the readers what they interpret as "successful integration" because, as Castles et al. (2001, 12) states, "there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated." Thus, it cannot be defined ultimately in this thesis what constitutes successful integration and neither should this be the purpose. Still, integration will be the main subject throughout this thesis and it will be up to the readers to judge for themselves what they understand as successful integration. For this reason, a brief overview of different viewpoints of integration will be provided that exist in the literature of this field and in the minds of people around the world.

2.1.1. Four modes of acculturation

The term "integration" is commonly used for the process of adaption and adjustment of migrants to a new society and culture. Though, what most people understand as integration is merely one form of “acculturation”, which covers all forms of adaption processes of a group of people to a new culture in terms of values, customs, language, religion, technology and more. To be more precise, integration is one of the following four modes of acculturation (also called defined strategies, orientations, attitudes or preferences) (Berry 2003). According to socio-psychologist scholar John Berry (2003), these different ways how acculturation may take place mainly depend on two criteria: Whether or not one’s cultural identity and customs are to be maintained and whether or not it is important to establish intercultural connections with other groups.

1. **Integration**: Acculturation happens in the form of integration when both criteria - to maintain the own cultural identity and to establish contacts with other cultural groups - are pursued.

2. **Assimilation**: Assimilation happens when connections to the host culture are established, while the own cultural identity is largely abandoned.

3. **Separation**: Separation takes place when the own cultural identity and customs are maintained and intercultural contacts with other groups are not aspired.

4. **Marginalization**: It is spoken of marginalization in the context of acculturation when both, the maintenance of one’s cultural identity and customs as well as intercultural contact to other groups are neglected.
2.1.2. Integration as a one-way process

Many people understand integration as a one-way process, in which the host society has no responsibility to adapt to newcomers or contribute to their integration process in any way. This view is, however, rather closely in relation with assimilation, which is the case when contact and mixing with the host society and its culture is valued and pursued by migrants, but the own cultural identity and customs are largely neglected. This perspective suggests that integration is a process in which refugees are for themselves responsible to adapt to the host society, which in turn has no responsibility to contribute to the newcomers’ successful adaption. This view therefore requires migrants to adopt the culture and values of the host society, while abandoning their own. Many authors criticize the view of acculturation as a one-way process: Lomba (2010), for example, criticizes the perception that the full responsibility of acculturation is on the side of refugees and that they are expected to abandon their own cultural markers for not recognizing the value of cultural and social diversity refugees can add to a society. Strang and Ager (2010) underline another point of critique: For a variety of reasons, not every refugee is able to adapt to the same extent. A 'predefined' level in the minds of people that marks successful integration, cannot be reached by everyone and those who “fail to integrate” are often seen as a problem by members of the host society, which in turn makes integration more difficult.

2.1.3. Integration as a two-way process

Another common perception of integration is that of a two-way process. This view states that both, refugees and the host society should be involved in the integration process. As Alencar (2017, 2) explains this view, the host society plays a crucial role and, instead of problematizing refugees, should ensure access to jobs, education, housing, health care, as well as culture and language learning possibilities for refugees, in order to being able to become an integrated part of society. Lewis (2005) states that the perceptions and attitudes of the host society towards refugees are critical to their integration process as they influence their willingness and ability to identify and create a sense of belonging. As a further consequence, if there is little encouragement and support from the host society and refugees find it more difficult to integrate, they are likely to be seen as unwilling to do so and therefore as a threat to social cohesion. Considering these dynamics, the majority of the scholars in this field advocate that integration is a two-way process in which it is important that migrants’ own cultural identities are not fully abandoned. Thus, there is broad agreement that social support from the host society is essential for a positive integration process of newcomers. However, regardless of the locals’ attitudes towards integration, whether the integration or assimilation perspective is predominant, it is widely recognized that refugees have to be prepared to adapt to the culture and norms of their new surroundings (Ager & Strang 2008).

As one refugee admitted in an interview undertaken by the ECRE (European Council on Refugees and Exiles) Task Force on Integration: “(…) we have to adapt. I don't ask the Italian to have the
same mentality as mine; it's me to get my mentality closer to his. This is a rule, because it's me who came here, it's for me to look for the way through which I can, I don't know, how we call it, integration" (ECRE 1999). From the political perspective, in many countries there are policies that explicitly determine responsibilities that refugees must carry in order to be able to live there and be accepted.

In the following chapters, the term “successful integration” will be used repeatedly. As it is not possible to ultimately define what constitutes “successful integration”, a framework will be explained, which provides a better idea of the various domains of integration. It should help to better comprehend the term “successful integration”.

### 2.1.4. Core domains of successful integration

Ager and Strang (2008) developed a framework that identifies several elements that are, according to them, central to what constitutes successful integration. The framework includes ten core domains. These are divided into four areas:

1. Access and achievement across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health
2. Processes of social connection – within ethnic and religious groups and across different groups, and to institutions
3. Facilitators and barriers related to language, culture, safety and stability
4. Assumptions, policies and practices regarding rights and citizenship

![Figure 2: Framework for core domains of successful integration by Ager and Strang (2008)](image)

#### 2.1.4.1. Markers and Means

Ager and Strang (2008) indicate that the success of individual processes of integration is often assessed on the basis of a number of key areas in the public arena, like employment, education, housing and health. In their framework, the authors describe these key areas as "Markers and Means". They state that achievements in these areas should not be seen only as markers of successful integration, but that at the same time they also serve as means which are necessary
for being able to integrate in the first place. The key areas within this domain will be described in more detail in the following (Ager and Strang 2008, 169-173).

**Employment:**
Employment, one of the "Markers and Means" for successful integration, is a crucial factor that influences many other important issues. Being employed causes economic independence, it enables planning for the future as well as interactions with members of the host society and it furthermore provides the opportunity to develop language skills. Moreover, employment can significantly boost self-esteem and self-reliance, both highly important in integrating in a new society.

However, refugees typically face major barriers to employment. Even though they are often highly educated (Muus 1997), they may be confronted with the problem that their qualifications and previous work experience might not be recognized, either because employers do not acknowledge them as such, or because of their own inability to provide proof. As a consequence, if they are employed, refugees often hold jobs that underrepresent their qualifications and skills, which in turn dampens the above mentioned positive effects of having a job.

**Housing:**
Not only is housing essential for every human's physical and emotional well-being, it is also well documented in research literature that it is a decisive factor for refugees to feel at home in a new country and a necessity to integrate (Glover et al. 2001). What is more, neighborhood plays an important role for being able and willing to interact with and learn from local citizens.

**Education:**
Education, another key area of “Markers and Means” for successful integration, does not only foster the possibilities in the job market, it also arguably enables refugees to take part in the society more actively and constructively. Schools are not only the institutions that are ultimately linked to education, but they are also highly important places of contact for students as well as for parents. Thus, schools provide good opportunities for establishing relationships. It is argued that schools are experienced eminently important places for refugees for interactions that are perceived as supportive for integration. While education is undoubtedly a highly essential factor for integration, refugee children still face many problems to obtain the full benefit of schooling. First and foremost, refugee children's lack of knowledge of the host-country language hinders their learning capabilities significantly. They are also at risk to face isolation and exclusion in the form of racism, discrimination and bullying. In any case, difficulties in making friends and being accepted and respected negatively impacts children's education experiences. Another problem is that refugees usually lack information about the school system. Especially, insufficient knowledge about choices of subjects and the consequences for their options in the labor market demonstrate another area
where there is room for improvement in order to create settings that are more supportive for integration.

Health:
Although health is not very often listed as a key factor for successful integration in the literature, logically it is a precondition for active interaction within a society. However, it is not as easy and self-evident for refugees to receive information and health provision than it is for local citizens. A lack of knowledge about various services might cause people to using them inappropriately or prevent them from taking up such services in the first place. Language difficulties furthermore constitute barriers to communicate with doctors and health care professionals.

There is broad agreement among scholars that the above mentioned domains - employment, housing, education and health - are essential for newcomers' successful integration into a new society. However, thinking of the huge inequalities between people within these areas, and the fact that among locals, such inequalities do not raise the question if a person is well integrated, it is obvious that there must be more than employment, housing, education and health that constitutes successful integration.

2.1.4.2. Social Connection
According to the findings of Ager and Strang (2008), social connection is seen as one of the most important features of an integrated community. It is more than just toleration of new members in a society, or the absence of conflict. Social connection emerges when there is an active mixing of people from different groups which results in a sense of belonging and is seen as an ultimate component of successful integration. This feeling of belonging is characterized by friendships, links with family and a shared sense of respect and values. Social connection is separated into three different forms: social bonds, social bridges and social links. They will be explained in more detail in the following (Ager & Strang 2008, 177-181).

Social bonds:
Social bonds can be understood as connections with family and other people of the same ethnic, national or religious group. For refugees, this form of social connection is especially valuable because it enables them to "(...) share cultural practices and maintain familiar patterns of relationships" (Ager & Strang 2008, 178). Social bonds serve as contact points for refugees, who are often lonely and isolated individuals that lack answers to important questions of daily life in their new surroundings. Through social bonds, refugees can get support in dealing with these issues by connecting with people who have faced similar challenges. Furthermore, social bonds offer the chance for activities with people from the same ethnic or national group while they can talk in their native language and share information about the situation in their home country (Duke
Additionally, social bonds can lower the risk of mental health issues like depression (Hyman et al. 1996, 6), which is often a serious problem for refugees.

Social bridges:
Besides connections with family and friends and people of the same cultural/ethnic background, relations with people from the host-society are also a form of social connection, specifically, social bridges. This type of interaction is highly important for refugees to feel "at home". Individual acts of friendliness, like being greeted by others on the streets, appear to have a disproportional positive impact on the feeling of being integrated. It gives refugees the sense that their presence is welcome and contributes to their feeling of safety and their perceived quality of life. Reversely, perceived unfriendliness has an enormously negative effect on successful integration and inhibits refugees to feel as a part of the new society.

Social links:
"While social bonds describe connections that link members of a group, and social bridges connections between such groups, social links refer to the connections between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services" (Ager & Strang 2008, 181). A general challenge with refugee movements is to provide equal access to services provided by the state as much as possible. Refugees face particular circumstances that put them at a disadvantage in contrast to locals: They are not familiar with the general surrounding, especially in terms of laws, public services, public institutions, etc. and they do not speak the host-country language. This demands additional effort from refugees themselves, the broad community, from policy makers and providers of public services who are responsible to make these social links easily accessible for refugees, if they are expected to integrate successfully.

2.1.4.3. Facilitators
Among the core domains of the framework, two types of factors are identified that very directly encourage integration: Social connection and facilitators. Social connection, which was explained above, is seen to play an essential role in nurturing integration at a local level, whereas facilitators can be seen as mediators which have the potential to remove barriers of integration. These facilitators are language and cultural knowledge as well as safety and stability and they will be explained in the following (Ager & Strang 2008, 182-184).

Language and cultural knowledge:
The first and arguably most important area where barriers of integration can be removed is language and cultural knowledge. A central necessity to being able to integrate is the ability to speak the language of the host society. However, when integration is not understood as a sole responsibility of the refugees themselves, but also from the host society as a whole, it must be
clear that communities and institutions (especially providers of special public services like health care institutions) must reduce existing barriers of access to key information in order to foster refugee integration. Provision of information material in refugees' native languages and/or with easily understandable symbols could be one example to reduce these barriers, which is partly already done in practice. But typically for a controversial field like integration, not everyone agrees with this idea. People might argue that such measures rather make the necessity redundant to learn the language, and therefore inhibit refugees' motivation to improve their language skills. The findings of Ager and Strang (2008, 182), however, suggest that especially in the early stages of settlement, where refugees have no language skills at all, translation and interpreting services are crucial for their integration and learning process. Also, a broad provision of courses that improve language and cultural knowledge facilitates integration. Besides official courses, which are limited and cannot alone satisfy the learning requirements of all, such courses are often organized by volunteers who want to contribute to remove barriers. As it will be shown later in this thesis, this happens more and more on digital platforms, like Youtube.

**Safety and stability:**

In integration literature, safety and stability is not a domain as prominent as language and cultural knowledge, but still, its fundamental importance in this field is widely acknowledged. Ager and Strang (2008, 184) were affirmed in interviews that refugees are more likely to feel positive about their new surroundings if they perceive them as peaceful. Incidents of verbal abuse, being threatened or acts of violence inhibit a feeling of (physical) safety, which is essential for feeling at home and being able to integrate. Obviously, this is a common problem: locals often have prejudices and worry about the harmony in their community when refugees settle. Media plays a big role in this tense field as headlines often lead to generalization and mistrust (Lewis 2005, 23-26). Trust is required so that both sides can experience a peaceful coexistence.

**2.1.4.4. Foundation**

**Rights and citizenship:**

The last domain of the framework for successful integration is about citizenship and the rights and responsibilities associated with it. This domain, which is labelled “Foundation” by Ager and Strang (2008, 173-177), is a highly controversial topic of public debate that creates a lot of confusion and disagreement among society. There are many different understandings of citizenship and nationhood across different cultures but also across individuals. The understanding of successful integration depends very much on a society's sense of identity and its interpretation of nationhood (Saggar 1995, 106). Faist (1995) compared Germany with France, an example that shows well that different nations have varying perceptions of nationhood. While in Germany the concept of nationhood has historically been based on whether or not someone was born there, or even more narrowly considered, whether their parents and grandparents were born there, in France this does
not play a big role. France, in contrast, rather interprets itself as a nation where people choose to belong. In this context, it can be differentiated between two dominant models concerning citizenship and nationhood in western democracies: ethno-cultural political exclusion (e.g. Germany) and pluralist political inclusion (e.g. USA, UK, France; Faist 1995). This differentiation very much influences how integration is seen in different nations and also how the “success” of integration is evaluated. In countries where ethno-cultural political exclusion is predominant, society is more likely to associate integration with assimilation. Refugees are expected to adapt to the host society and its culture and values and largely abandon their own cultural identities. The understanding of citizenship and nationhood of a society is not only important because it defines how integration is perceived, but also because it can be seen as the fundament of our understanding of the rights accorded to and responsibilities expected from refugees (O’Neill 2001). As Ager and Strang (2008, 175) point out: “These rights do not in themselves define integration, but they underpin important assumptions about integration.”

It was found out in several interviews that equality in rights and responsibilities is fundamental for a peaceful and respectful together. “For example, refugees commonly reported distress at having been described as ‘scroungers’ when, as asylum seekers without the right to work, they had to depend on benefits” (Ager & Strang 2008, 176). This indicates that often, ineffective policy making inhibits successful integration. Thus, as O’Neill (2001) highlights, policy makers have a major role in defining rights and responsibilities as well as general integration policies, but clearly, successful integration depends on the contributions of all sectors of society, including politics, public institutions, community and religious leaders, employers and voluntary organizations, as well as society as a whole.

Summing up, Ager and Strang (2008) developed a multidimensional approach to explain integration, in order to assess and improve the work of organizations and policy-makers in terms of migrant integration. The framework can also be used elsewhere in the area of integration as it serves as a solid foundation for a better understanding of this often ambiguous topic. This framework includes what the authors describe as "Markers and Means" (employment, housing, education, health), "Social Connection" (social bridges, social bonds, social links), "Facilitators" (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability) and "Foundation" (rights and citizenship). The areas employment, education, housing and health are summed up as "Markers and Means" because accomplishments in these areas are often perceived by society as markers of successful integration and at the same time serve as means to actually make efforts towards integration possible. Often, these areas are the first and most obvious public "impressions" of integration. "Social Connection" describes the relationship-perspective of integration and is therefore a domain less obvious from outside but is equally important. Social connections can be social bonds, which are connections to members of the same ethnic, national or religious groups. Social connections also involve social bridges, which are connections with members of different
groups, like relations with locals (in the context of refugees). Finally, social connections can also be in the form of social links, which describe connections to important institutions like schools, public health care services, etc. “Facilitators” are defined as factors that remove barriers and therefore are of special importance for refugees' ability to integrate. These barriers are language and cultural knowledge as well as safety and stability.

The domain “Foundation” describes the role of rights and citizenship. This domain is about the predominant perception of nationhood in a society and about the enablement and also the utilization of rights and the fulfillment of responsibilities. The host society’s as well as refugees’ understanding of the concept “citizen” plays an important role in this context.

The framework of core domains of successful integration will later in this thesis be applied to the findings of this study in order to evaluate the impact of social media on integration in each of the just described domains.

2.2. Integration and social media

Communication is a central aspect in almost any kind of human interaction, and it is of special significance when immigrants adapt to a new society. In today's world, communication does not only take place directly from person to person, but, with the emergence of digital technologies, increasingly via digital channels. New forms of communication like social media have a strong potential to transform communication and therefore, to some extent, also integration processes of migrants (McGregor & Siegel 2013) and the above mentioned core domains. The theory of technological determinism (Adler 2008) is the idea that the way how a society thinks and behaves is to a great extent determined by technology. This theory supports the argument that social media has an impact on integration.

With new technologies, there emerge various new possibilities for refugees already before and during fleeing but also during their integration process in a new society. Among all technologies and applications, those related to social media arguably provide the most benefits in this context. The special advantage of social media applications is the possibility for its users to consume, produce and share information, opinions and other content within and across certain networks. Users can therefore choose with whom they want to connect and whose content, statements and opinions they want to see. In the case of refugees, this is especially useful as it enables them to get a lot of essential information from others that face the same challenges, that would otherwise be almost impossible to receive. The utility of social media was also confirmed in the interviews that were done in the process of this study. It was stated by all of the interviewed refugees that they preferred social media platforms over ordinary websites or other sources of information. This is not surprising since social media is arguably the simplest way for them to connect to people
from the host society, to other refugees who have been or will be facing the same problems, as well as to friends and family from their home country. In other words, the interviewed refugees stated that social media makes it easier for them to build social bonds, social bridges and social links.

Connecting with people from the same ethnic, religious, or cultural group and staying in contact with friends and family from home is vital for refugees‘ well-being, because it helps them to overcome feelings of loneliness and gives them highly important emotional support (Strang & Ager 2010). The emergence of social media has made it drastically easier for refugees to build and maintain such social bonds. This situation is the basis for one argument against the idea that social media facilitates and accelerates refugees‘ integration process. Some scholars argue that, with the existence of social media and the opportunity to build and maintain social bonds, refugees do not necessarily need to develop social bridges and find contact in the host society and therefore it is argued that integration takes places more slowly (Komito 2011). Contrary to this, there is strong evidence that it is highly important for refugees to maintain social relationships in the home country and connect with people of the same ethnic or religious group online in order to overcome adjustment challenges (Elias & Lemish 2009). It is argued that this does not decelerate integration and lead to segregation in the new society, but rather supports newcomers in their integration process and encourages them to establish connections with locals.

Refugees can benefit from using social networks by obtaining information – for example about rights and citizenship and local migrant support services – or by connecting with other refugees, helping each other and thus overcoming feelings of loneliness (Dekker & Engbersen 2014). Furthermore, there is also the possibility to improve language skills via online channels (McGregor & Siegel 2013, 10). A lot of content is offered in Youtube and also in Facebook that should support refugees in their language learning efforts. This content is provided by individuals who are refugees themselves, but also by native speakers from the host society who want to help.

Alencar (2017), one of few researchers in the relatively new combined field of integration and social media, studied the relevance of social media in key areas of integration, like employment, education, linguistic and cultural competence, social capital and rights and citizenship. In the following, the main findings of her in-depth interviews with refugees from Syria, Eritrea and Afghanistan, who escaped to the Netherlands, will be discussed based on the above represented framework by Ager and Strang (2008), which she applied in her study.

Alencar (2017) found out that refugees have a greater preference for social media platforms over other Internet applications when they want to search for and exchange information about life in their new society. It was revealed that social media platforms like Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber, Google and Line are the most relevant among Syrian refugees. According to the study, refugees spend about seven hours per day on these platforms, which is partly explainable by their vast amount of spare time. According to participants, life in the camps and centers can be very difficult and monotonous for each and every refugee. There
are few or no specific leisure or training activities for them, and this factor helps explain their
greater need for these tools as means to cope with anxiety at the center” (Alencar 2017, 8-9). It
was also found out that the participants had used social media much less intensively back in their
home countries due to busy working schedules and/or limited access to the internet and most
likely for psychological reasons too.

Even though the participants in the study recognized the importance of social media platforms for
their lives in the new country, they were aware of the disadvantages of excessive use of it. They
reported to find it problematic to spend several hours per day on these platforms and they also
highlighted their doubt in the credibility of certain information in social media. "As one interviewee
put it: 'we do not know exactly if this information is right or wrong. So I am not sure if this
information is true or not, who published or who is the responsible for this information.' (man 7,
Syria)" (Alencar 2017, 9).

It is obvious that more research in this field of integration and social media is required in order to
better understand the dynamics and the effects this new form of communication has on integration
in its various domains. This thesis should help to expand the knowledge about this relatively new
crossing field. In this study, more than 2500 actual postings in refugee networks in social media
were analyzed and the results will later be compared to the insights of Alencar’s study (2017).
Therefore, her findings will be discussed next.

2.2.1. Social media and the core domains of integration
Alencar (2017) oriented towards the previously presented framework by Ager and Strang (2008)
in her qualitative interviews. Her findings in the specific domains of the framework will be discussed
in the following.

2.2.1.1. Social media and “Markers and Means”
With regard to issues like employment, housing, health and education, which can all be assigned
to “Markers and Means”, Alencar’s (2017, 9) findings indicate that social media is not the ultimate
source of information. Only less than half of her study participants stated to use social media for
obtaining information in these areas. The following was named as one reason for this. According
to the respondents, the main reason for the limited use of social media as a source of information
in the areas of “Markers and Means” of integration is that there has been a rise of informal refugee
networks, for example in the form of Facebook pages, where – according to the interviewees - the
exchanged information focusses more on practical issues of the host society, like basic information
about locations, transportation, shopping etc. The respondents argued that they relayed more on
individual social contacts when it comes to information about employment, education, housing or
health. In the course of this thesis, exactly such informal online networks were analyzed. It will
later be shown whether or not the findings are in line with the statements of Alencar’s interview respondents.

2.2.1.2. Social media and “Social Connection”

Several scholars already highlighted the potential of social media to help in establishing social bonds as well as social bridges (Peeters & D’Haenens 2005). One of the most critical barriers for refugees to integrate successfully is the inability to speak the language of the host country. Social bridges, in this context especially connections with people from the host society, fundamentally enhance refugees’ learning progress of the language and culture. Logically, refugees ought to be expected to have a strong motivation to link with local citizens. Since opportunities to establish such links and to interact with locals are often limited for refugees, especially in the early stages of settlement, social media is a highly appreciated tool to find contacts. There are special Facebook pages, for example, that aim to promote the intercultural contact by serving as a platform where events can be organized for bringing together refugees and interested locals (Alencar 2017, 10).

Social bridges are essential for integration to take place successfully, but equally important are social bonds. Here, again, social media is a valuable tool that helps to maintain such. Contacting family and friends and staying updated with them was nearly impossible for refugees in earlier times but this has changed. Social media enables refugees to maintain contact with beloved ones and establish new relations with others who are in a similar situation. This is of fundamental value, as it helps them to feel positive and confident. Even though, as Komito (2011) argues, some people think that interactions amongst people from the same ethnic group do not lead to integration, the importance of the emotional support from such relationships should not be disregarded, especially in a situation where refugees are trying to establish a life from scratch in a new society.

Especially in the early stages of settlement, social media also plays an important role when it comes to information about public services, offices, authorities, NGOs, refugee centers and other institutions of the host country, summed up as “social links” in this context. Refugees, who would normally be overwhelmed and unaware where to go and who to consult when confronted with a problem, can get a good overview of the available options relatively easy with the help of social media. They can use platforms like Facebook as a starting point for obtaining crucial information so that they do not feel helpless during their first steps of integration (Alencar 2017, 11). Respondents of Alencar’s interviews stated that finding proper information about foundational issues of integration like immigration procedures, laws and other issues concerning rights on Websites of official institutions can often be difficult and confusing, a point that was also brought up by Benton and Glennie (2016, 6). It was stated that Facebook is more commonly used among refugees as a source for information regarding social links, even though refugees are aware that not every information in social media is trustworthy (Alencar 2017, 13).
2.2.1.3. Social media and “Facilitators”

For refugees, it is often difficult and might take several time to get access to official language courses, which is one reason why many of them try to find other ways to effectively learn the language of the host country. Social media valuable opportunities for this. The video platform Youtube, for example, serves as a place where people try to help others in learning a new language. There are numerous people who share dedicatedly produced videos in which they teach their viewers certain language skills (Alencar 2017, 11). Since the massive refugee movements into Europe in the recent years, there appeared hundreds of language courses on Youtube, which are accessible for everyone. The languages that are taught in these courses are mostly German but also English and Swedish and who produce these videos are either people from Arabic countries who are familiar with the host country language, or people from the host country who speak the Arabic language.

It should be very obvious at this point that social media has the potential to positively affect integration in several domains and certainly, there are many people who believe that it can also have a positive effect on people’s attitudes towards refugees. However, all participants in Alencar’s (2017, 11) study believed that what happens in social media does not reduce discrimination and racism but it might even reinforce negative stereotypical images of refugees and the Islam. The participants agreed upon the assumption that discrimination and racism on the individual level is more likely to be mitigated through direct and personal intercultural interactions rather than through digital experiences in social media. Despite their perceptions that currently social media does not help to fix or reduce stereotypes, many of them believed that it principally would have the potential to do so. One respondent, a male refugee from Syria, appreciated Facebook groups for initiatives that promote activities and meetings for intercultural dialog which are supportive for mutual understanding and language progresses. He suggested that the creation of more such groups would help to reduce stereotyping, discrimination and racism towards refugees.

2.2.1.4. Social media and “Rights and Citizenship”

According to statements of participants in Alencar’s (2017, 11-12) study, only few of them used Facebook groups for finding information about topics like immigration procedures, laws, taxes and other legal issues related to rights and citizenship. It was indicated that the search on official websites of public institutions can be quite troublesome. Refugees are often not aware of them and if so, many of these websites lack user-friendliness in terms of language, simplicity and clarity (Benton & Glennie 2016).

Summing up, social media can be of enormous value for refugees in a wide range of issues. According to Alencar’s (2017) findings, Facebook, Youtube and other social media applications are not only but particularly important within the areas of social connection and facilitators.
Facebook groups, for example, are a good place to establish intercultural contacts with locals and Youtube is a great platform for acquiring language skills and cultural competences. Social media enables refugees to stay in contact with family and friends in the home country, to get in contact with other refugees who are confronted with the same problems and questions, and of course also to local citizens. However, social media cannot alone be the key to successful integration and it cannot replace personal social connections. It was found out by Alencar (2017) that in some areas, personal contacts are preferred over social media as information source, partly due to a lack of credibility of certain information. Still, social media serves as a valuable starting point for questions about employment, education, housing, health, etc. Refugees can get a good orientation, especially when other sources fail to help, like official websites of important institutions, which often do not reach the intended audiences and are not user-friendly enough for newcomers (Benton & Glennie 2016).

This body of information is the basis on which the findings of my analysis will build on. After a description of the empirical method, it will be shown in which areas the results of the analysis support the findings of Alencar and in which do not.
3. Method

The methodological approach of this study involves steps of qualitative and of quantitative nature. The procedure was separated into three major steps. First, qualitative interviews were made in order to narrow the field for further research. After that, following the insights from the interviews, data from social media was collected. Finally, this data was analyzed in detail, using professional qualitative data analysis software. This resulted in a thematic map, where user-generated content in social media was quantified into several different categories. This forms the basis for the implications and recommendations that can be seen as the outcome of this study. In the following, the three steps and their interrelations are described in detail.

3.1. Interviews

The first challenge was to find basic information about how refugees collect and share their information. What are they searching for, which platforms do they use, which media do they consume? These were the questions that had to be answered before specific data collection and analysis could take place. In a steadily growing jungle of alternatives, it had to be found out which social media platforms and applications are used by refugees before actual data could be collected. For this, ten interviews were made. Friends and study colleagues with contacts to Syrian refugees helped me to find enough interview respondents. The solid base of information that was gathered through these interviews allowed to reasonably estimate the information behavior and social media use of Syrian refugees in Austria as a whole.

The ten interview partners were all male Syrian refugees that have come to Austria after 2012 and they were between eighteen and twenty-eight years old. The interviews took place either in the refugees’ rooms or in some public space. All interviews were held in German. This was because all participants preferred to speak in German and not in English. There were hardly any understanding difficulties during the interviews. It is also important to mention that the interviews were voluntary. The participants did not receive any incentives except my sincere thanks. I had the feeling that all of them very much appreciated the opportunity to speak German and to exchange their experiences with a local person. The interviews lasted about 45 minutes on average and they were not recorded, but only notes were taken. I believed that this way the interview partners would speak more openly and honestly than if they would have been recorded. Furthermore, I believed that word-by-word transcriptions of the dialogues were not necessary for the actual purpose of the interviews, which were held in a narrative nature. This means that the communication was arranged in a way that an introduction or an opening question to the topic was given and the interview partners were encouraged to speak as openly and freely as possible. While it was appreciated that the respondents expanded the topic and spoke freely to provide additional information, it was still ensured that they did not lose the focus and get too far away.
from the topic of interest throughout the talk. For information of special interest which was not covered by the respondents’ own narrations, I occasionally intervened and directed the conversation towards the subject, or asked explicitly. With this form of open conversation, it was expected to gain an information base as broad as possible. With an increasing number of interviews, the regularities in the statements of the respondents allowed to keep the subject of the conversation more and more narrow and precise, which resulted in both, a confirmation of the information from previous interviews as well as a more detailed exchange within the topics of interest. The aim of the interviews was to find out how refugees behave in order to obtain certain information. It was of special interest if, how and to which extent they used certain social media platforms and applications. As stated before, when it was already mentioned, from several previous interview partners, for example, that Facebook is by far the most preferred application to interact and get information, the subsequent interview partners were asked if they would confirm this and then the discussion was narrowed within this context. This procedure was continued until after ten interviews, the value of added information was no longer expected to justify the effort of additional interviews.

3.2. Data collection

The second step was to collect data from Facebook, which was identified in the interviews as by far the most relevant social media application for refugees to search and exchange information. The respondents’ preference of Facebook was so clear that it was the logical step to narrow the focus of the subsequent analysis on this social media platform. At this point, it is important to explain the basic structure and the possibilities of Facebook very briefly. Facebook can be used to make posts, which are statements that appear in the “feed” or on the “wall” of others (vice versa one’s own feed shows statements of others), and it provides the possibility to show your reactions to these statements (in the form of “likes” or symbols that express certain emotions) and to state your opinion in a comment. Facebook also offers a messenger function, which allows users to communicate directly with other people in text, voice, and video format. Furthermore, events can be planned and people can be invited to those events. Another essential element of Facebook is the function to organize groups, which can be imagined as either public or private networks or online communities where people can join, make statements and discuss about the specific topic of the group. It can be imagined as sort of an individual social network within Facebook, usually with a specific topical focus.

Exactly such groups were the source of the data that was analyzed in the course of this study. As already stated, the interviews revealed that Facebook is the favored source of information for refugees for important issues related to integration. More precisely, the interviewed refugees talked about Facebook groups that have been created by individuals, who more or less dedicatedly administrate and moderate the respective group. These groups have been created for refugees
to exchange about anything relevant for their lives after they left their home-country and came to Austria. Another simple reason why the analysis focuses on Facebook groups only is because, in contrast to the normal “newsfeed” and the messenger element, it is the only element of the social media platform that can actually be analyzed practically with the available means. Those groups appear either in public or in private form. In public groups, everyone can join, while in private ones, users first have to be accepted. For reasons of accessibility, only public groups were analyzed in this study. Also, it was assumed that because of their public nature, those groups would be more relevant for refugees to search for and share information that can be expected to be interesting for others as well. This was also indicated in the interviews. Following a first intensive research in Facebook using various suitable keywords, six groups were chosen that were analyzed intensively in the subsequent step. These six groups are described briefly below:

**Group 1:** Arab In Austria
(https://www.facebook.com/groups/23007814467/about/)
This group already exists since 2008. At the time of the data analysis it had almost 7200 members and an average of four posts per day. In the group description it says “For all Arabs living in Austria. Please do not publish anything related to politics and religious extremism.” From this group, 628 posts between May and November 2017 were analyzed.

**Group 2:** النمسا في العريبة لجاليه
(Translation: Austrian youth (language learning) and everything related to asylum, events and help; https://www.facebook.com/groups/1690683224533279/about/)
This group was created in February 2016. It had almost 9200 members at the time of the analysis and the average amount of posts per day was less than one. The Arabic group description can be translated into “Today and tomorrow we will grow bigger and bigger and find more opportunities to seize.” A total of 611 posts between July 2016 and November 2017 were analyzed from this group. Meanwhile, the administrator has obviously changed the topic and the purpose of the group completely and set the focus to cryptocurrencies, as indicated from a new group name and description and a logo that shows the symbols of famous cryptocurrencies. The analysis happened before that change and this is just mentioned to avoid confusion for readers who want to follow the link to the group and explore it for themselves.

**Group 3:** النمسا في السوريون
(Translation: Syrians in Austria; https://www.facebook.com/groups/1583275978592295/about/)
This group has been online since June 2016. At the time of the analysis, it had more than 1060 members. An average of 15 new posts were made per day at that time. In the group description, translated into English, it says “We must be one Syrian family in Austria”. In total, 445 posts between September 2017 and November 2017 were analyzed from this group.
Group 4: (Translation: Syrians in Austria; https://www.facebook.com/groups/1574581929461784/about/)
The administrator of this group created it in May 2015. Until the time of the analysis, more than 4600 people joined the group, who all together publish an average of two posts per day. The group description represents a unifying sentiment and was translated into “We care about all the Syrians in Austria. And we call them to be one hand and we help each other by caring about all.” From this group, 102 posts were analyzed, starting from November 2017.

Group 5: (Translation: Syrians convene in Austria; https://www.facebook.com/groups/1582941591993282/about/)
This group exists since May 2015 and it had almost 4700 members at the time of the analysis. On average, three posts are made every two days. The admins describe the group as “A group aimed at getting acquainted and helping solve the problems of the Syrians in Austria.” In total, 375 posts between March and November 2017 were analyzed from this group.

Group 6: (Translation: Syrian community in Austria; https://www.facebook.com/groups/797786446963232/about/)
This group was created in March 2015 and had almost 4700 members at the time of the analysis. Within three days, the members publish an average of two posts. The group description can be translated into “Welcome to the Syrian community group in Austria. The goal is to help people living here in Austria and benefit from each other. Your questions and answers are welcome.” From this group, 426 posts between February and November 2017 were analyzed.

From every group, a considerable amount of posts was collected. The posts were copied into a table in a MS Word document in consecutive order, from newer to older posts. Because of the countless number of posts in these groups, a limit had to be set. Unfortunately, the decision of this limit was not very scientifically sound. I decided to stop when twenty pages of content in the Word document were reached. Because of this procedure, the amount of posts that were analyzed from each group vary. Clearly, a pre-defined number of posts would have been a better limit and scientifically much more professional. It has to be mentioned that for Group 4, the amount of analyzed posts is smaller because of an unfortunate, unexpected loss of a document. Limitations like this will be discussed in the end of this thesis. However, the total amount of 2587 analyzed posts represents an adequate sampling size which allows to draw reasonable general conclusions. As a solid base of data is essential in order for making a profound analysis, the posts were copied completely in their original form in most cases. For posts of certain categories which occurred very often, like “spam” or “language learning”, just the category name was noted as a label, but only when the category was already clear and the exact content did not provide any
further information. All posts were collected successively without filtering or skipping any. The posts were all in Arabic language, except of very few which were in German or English. Because of that, the posts had to be translated. This was done with the help of the Google translator, which turned out to be the most reliable and accurate translation tool for Arabic language, among several free alternatives that were tried. However, this translation tool is still far from perfect, what led to many inaccurate translations that lower the quality of this analysis slightly. Nonetheless, most of the inaccurately translated posts could be clearly assigned to a category, because their rough meaning could still be comprehended.

3.3. Data analysis

After collection of the posts from the six different Facebook groups, the next step was to analyze them. Depending on their content, the posts were assigned to different categories. These categories were not predefined, but rather emerged and expanded during the analysis. More and more categories were created during the process and it was checked for every post whether it could be assigned to an existing category. If this was not the case, a new category was created. As already indicated before, the Google translator varies a lot in terms of the quality of translations from Arabic to English or German language. English and German were both used for the translation, in order to better understand the content of poorly translated posts. Those posts where the subject could not be identified at all were assigned to a separate category. The assignment of the posts to the different categories was done with the qualitative data analysis software “Nvivo”, which allows easy creation of categories (so called “nodes”). The tool lets the user assign text elements (“references”) from documents – in this case the translated posts – to different created nodes (categories) per drag and drop and it is also possible to coordination the text elements within and across the categories easily. Given these features, this tool was the perfect solution for transforming the posts form the Facebook groups into a quantified overview. Sometimes, posts were assigned to more than one category depending on their content. Also, many categories have sub-categories. The categorization of the qualitative data required a lot of subjective judgement and evaluation and furthermore, as already mentioned, the translations of the posts were often far from clear. Certainly, not everybody would agree with the category which every single post was assigned to and undoubtedly, the resulting overview would look somehow different if another person would analyze list of posts and assign them to different categories. However, I argue that this the nature of a qualitative data analysis. Considering the given circumstance that the poor translations often left a lot of room for subjective interpretation, this should be understandable. Finally, I can assure that the data analysis was done with my best of knowledge and belief.
4. Outcome

In the following, the results of the data analysis will be presented. First, an overview will be given for each group, which shows the proportions of the thematic categories of the posts. An overall overview that combines all six groups will be provided as well. In order to give the reader a profound understanding of the categories, examples will be shown, how posts in the different categories might look like. This should give the reader a better idea about the concerns behind these posts, so that the category labels can be interpreted better.

4.1. Group 1

The chart for Group 1 obviously shows that there is one category that exceeds all the others by far. This category is "spam", a very special category that will be discussed with exceptional attention later in this thesis. Simply explained, any posts that appeared again and again in the same form were assigned to this category. The posts of this category must not be ignored, but they rather have significant relevance for this study and play a big role in the final recommendations.

![Figure 3: Categorical segmentation in Group 1](image-url)

Spam posts also account for the biggest share in almost all other groups. For this reason, separated charts will be provided that exclude this category. These charts should simulate the situation where posts that were assigned to the category “spam” are not existent. There is reason to assume that this is more or less the way how users of these groups perceive it when they look through the content in those Facebook groups. In contrast to most other posts, which are...
thoroughly in accordance with the purpose of the groups (to share useful information, to help others and to be helped), there are hardly any reactions like comments or “likes” to spam posts. For this reason, I argue that these are perceived as “annoying” elements that are simply ignored by most of the people who interact in these groups. This assumption was checked back and confirmed by two of the initial interview partners. Considering this, it is useful to provide separate charts where the category “spam” is excluded, in order to provide a better view of the remaining categories. Logically, for these charts, the total number of posts has been recalculated, reduced by the number of spam posts (from 2,587 to 1,216 in total). Because of this, the values differ in percentage in the charts with and without spam. Also, it has to be clarified that the added up percentages surpass 100% because some posts have been assigned to more than one category.

![Figure 4: Categorical segmentation in Group 1 (excluding spam)](chart)

In this chart, where spam posts are excluded, it is visible that the most relevant issue in this group is language learning (17.61%). Almost as many posts are about housing (14.77%), followed by posts about fleeing (7.39%). 6.82% percent of the posts in Group 1 are announcements of some kind of events. Posts about news, religious posts and such posts, in which a person asks for help in a specific, individual matter, each account for 6.25%. Other categories are business related posts (5.68%), higher education (3.98%), and “marketplace” (posts where people want to sell or buy a specific item, 3.98%). Only relatively few posts in Group 1 are about employment (3.41%) and everything that has to do with asylum procedures and necessary documents etc. (2.84%). Medical issues are addressed in 2.27% of the cases. Other categories like the Austrian culture and values, information about other destination countries, as well as politics and individually offered services each account for less than 2%. In even less posts (0.57%), legal issues are
treated or links to supportive websites are provided. 2.84% of the posts in Group 1 were judged to be possibly alarming or at least dubious. Because of their (possibly) illegal or threatening content, these posts might be relevant from a juridical perspective and therefore of serious interest for governmental authorities. Public surveillance is a topic where opinions are morally divided, and in the context of refugee networks in social media, the topic is probably even more delicate. For this reason, the category of posts with alarming content will be discussed in more depth later in this thesis. 4.55% of the posts in Group 1 did not match to any of the alternative categories and were therefore labelled “Other posts”.

**4.2. Group 2**

In Group 2, almost every third post is spam (30.44%). Compared to the other groups, however, this is a relatively small proportion.

![Figure 5: Categorical segmentation in Group 2](image)

When spam is excluded, three out of four posts in Group 2 are about language learning (75.53%), which is consequently by far the most relevant issue in this group. As in Group 1, the second-most posts are about accommodation (7.53%). 3.29% of the posts address asylum procedures or specific documents. All other categories each account for less than 3% of the total analyzed posts in Group 2.
4.3. Group 3

Group 3 is no exception - the vast majority of the posts in this group (56,6%) are spam.
After excluding spam posts from the analysis, the most posts in Group 3 address accommodation problems (36.08%). 8.76% of the posts are offers of specific services from individuals. Slightly fewer posts are statements or questions about employment (7.22%). This category is followed by posts in which people want to sell or buy a specific item (6.7%) and posts regarding business (5.67%). Posts about fleeing and posts where someone asks for help in a specific matter account for 4.12% each. Just as many posts concern language learning, a topic that is surprisingly irrelevant in this group, compared to the other groups. In 3.61% of the cases, medical issues as well as news were addressed. Posts about asylum procedures and relevant documents account for 3.09%. 5.67% of the posts were undefinable due to inadequate translation and 4.12% did not fit to any of the alternative categories. 2.08% of the posts were of possibly alarming or at least of dubious nature. All other categories account for less than 2% each.

Figure 8: Categorical segmentation in Group 3 (excluding spam)
4.4. Group 4

In Group 4, again, the majority of the posts are spam (46.08%).

When spam posts are excluded, almost every third post in Group 4 is about housing (29.09%). In 14.55% of the posts, users try to sell or buy a specific item. The topic language learning accounts for 10.91%. 9.09% of the posts are about fleeing and about specific services that are offered by users. Posts regarding business account for 7.27%. 3.64% were each assigned to the categories asylum procedures and relevant documents, employment and news. 9.09% of the posts in Group 4 were judged alarming or at least dubious, insofar as they contain possibly illegal or threatening content. All other categories account for less than 2% each.

Figure 9: Categorical segmentation in Group 4
4.5. Group 5

Group 5 shows a familiar pattern: More than half of the posts are spam (51.73%).

Figure 10: Categorical segmentation in Group 4 (excluding spam)

Figure 11: Categorical segmentation in Group 5
Except spam, most posts in Group 5 address issues of housing (16.57%), followed by ‘sell/buy’ posts (13.81%) and the category language learning (11.60%). 9.39% of the posts are such, in which specific services are offered by users. Announcements of certain events account for 7.73%, slightly more than business related posts (7.18%). In 5.52% of the posts, issues about employment are addressed and in 4.42%, some kind of news are provided. Medical issues account for 3.87% and issues concerning the asylum procedure and links to external supportive websites both for 3.31%. 4.42% of the posts could not be translated in a way that allowed to understand their meaning and 9.39% were identified as alarming/dubious.

![Figure 12: Categorical segmentation of Group 5 (excluding spam)](image-url)
4.6. Group 6

Group 6 also contains a lot of spam. More precisely, 56.1% of the posts were identified as such.

When spam posts are excluded from the analysis, accommodation is the most discussed topic in Group 6. Almost every fifth post is from someone who looks for or offers a place to stay (19.79%). Unlike in the other groups, religion is a relatively important topic in this group, with almost 15% of the post containing religious content. Posts about language learning account for 9.63%, followed by such posts in which users offered some kind of service (8.56%). The categories “Flight”, “Help in specific matters” and “News” account for 5.88% of the posts each. 5.35% are business related and 4.28% are posts in which someone wants to sell or buy a specific item. There are four categories which account for 3.74% of the posts each. These are: “Employment”, “Events”, “Links to supportive websites” and “Medical issues”. All other categories in this group account for less than 3%. 6.42% of the posts in Group 6 attracted my attention because of their alarming content.
**4.7. Total results**

In the following, the overall result of all six groups taken together will be shown.

![Figure 14: Categorical segmentation in Group 6 (excluding spam)](image)

![Figure 15: Overall categorical segmentation](image)
Figure 15 shows the categorical segmentation of all analyzed posts from the six different Facebook groups taken together. As it was already obvious from the results of the individual groups, the vast majority of the posts are spam. At this point, it is important to mention again that the analyzed Facebook groups originally serve as platforms where refugees exchange themselves and provide and receive help. Posts that appear again and again in the same form, without providing any value for the users, are not in accordance with this purpose. That is underlined by the fact that users hardly show any reactions to these posts, like comments or “likes”. Thus, it was assumed that they can be seen as annoying elements which are simply ignored by users.

Depending on their content, spam posts were separated into four sub-categories:

1. Spam - Accommodation:
   Among those posts, in which issues of housing are addressed, it was found out that some occur again and again in identical form. By their identical content and with the help of a telephone number, which is provided in many posts, it was possible to identify those constantly recurring posts. Basically, all of these posts are from people who offer a place to stay. More precisely, the submitters are searching for roommates who should live with them in their place, most probably in exchange for paying part of the rent. These posts are very likely copied and repeated again and again excessively until they have found someone. This is indeed in accordance with the purpose of the investigated Facebook groups, but, the approach makes these recurring posts spam for me and as there are hardly any reactions to them, it was assumed that they are perceived just as such by the community. Consequently, all these posts (except for the first one in each case) were assigned to the category “spam” in order to not distort the results for the category “Accommodation”.

2. Spam - Commercial posts:
   These posts are characterized by their commercial and recurring nature. They were found in identical form in almost all of the six groups. All these posts aim for selling something, but they must be differentiated from those individual posts in which users offer a specific item or service. Whether it is about a physical product, like Arabic coffee, or a service, like some kind of installation to receive certain international TV channels, a specific chargeable download, or anything else - all of these posts occur again and again in various of the analyzed Facebook groups. It can be assumed that private individuals or people who run a small business chose the strategy to constantly “penetrate” these Facebook groups with their offers, because this is a cheap way to precisely aim for a specific target group. However, the success of this procedure is questionable, because there are hardly any reactions to these posts, which is one reason to assume that the community perceives these posts as spam and largely ignores them.

3. Spam - Language:
These posts are about language courses, offered by an organization called “Lernpoint”. This alone does not make these posts spam, but the fact that they were found again and again very frequently in exactly the same form. Furthermore, there are hardly any reactions to these posts. This is why they were summarized as spam. When analyzing the content of the groups, it appeared very unlikely to me that users pay attention to these posts. Still, it is very obvious that this sub-category of spam does not have as much negative impact on the general perceived quality of the Facebook groups as other sorts of spam, like the previously described commercial spam posts, for example. More about the negative impacts of spam posts will be discussed later in this thesis.

4. Spam - News:
Some of the posts about news contain a link to a dubious website, which does not have anything to do with the news, but rather serves for advertisement or to sell the visitor some kind of membership. Thus, these news-post only serve as a kind of “clickbait” in order to lead users to the respective website. Furthermore, in most cases, the news articles are obviously unserious. Arguably, these posts can be interpreted similarly to commercial spam posts. Also, these posts occur again and again and consequently, they were not assigned to the category of (serious) news, but to spam.

5. Spam - Other:
This sub-category contains all other typical spam posts: posts that are not in accordance with the purpose of the Facebook groups, that do not fit to any other category and that do not provide any kind of useful information. The community largely ignores these posts and does not react to them via “likes” or comments.
As it is obvious from the missing reactions to posts that were assigned to the category “Spam”, it can be assumed that they are only perceived as annoying elements which are ignored and skipped by the vast majority of the users in the analyzed Facebook groups. This was also confirmed by two interview partners, who were called and asked about their experience in this context. Therefore, the following is an overview of the total results without spam posts, which are also excluded in all subsequent results that will be presented in the next chapter. It is then not mentioned again explicitly that spam posts are not included in the results.
Figure 17: Overall categorical segmentation (excluding spam)

What is most obvious is that there are two categories that make up for almost half of the overall posts in all six investigated Facebook groups. By far the most questions and statements regard language learning (33.31%). About half as many posts (17.35%) have to do with issues of housing. These two topics can be seen as those of most relevance in Facebook groups where refugees exchange information for establishing a new life after fleeing from their home countries. In 5.35% of the posts, some kind of specific services are offered by individuals. Almost as often (5.1%), users sold or searched for a specific item, for example furniture, a smartphone or a laptop. 4.03% of the posts have to do with business, like an announcement of a new restaurant being opened. Almost as many posts contain religious content (3.94%). Considering the importance of the topic, especially for refugees, relatively few posts are about employment (3.78%). Information about fleeing could be expected to be exchanged more often. Precisely, this is an issue in 3.7% of the posts in all six groups. In 3.54%, information about certain events is provided and in 3.45%, information about some kind of news. Assuming that Facebook groups would be a useful place to ask for help in specific, individual matters, especially for refugees who usually do not have many social contacts in their first phases of settlement, it is surprising that this is the case in only 3.37% of the posts. Even fewer posts (3.04%) treat asylum procedures, necessary documents and other information of this kind. Medical issues account for only 2.3% of all statements and questions. The remaining categories, higher education, links to supportive websites, politics, Austrian culture and values, information about other destination countries, law and school are relevant in less than 2% of the posts each. Some posts (2.71%) were not definable because they could not be translated in a way that allowed to identify the subject. In 3.53% of the cases, alarming or at least dubious
content was spotted. In most cases, it was an indication of fraud, like document forgery and people smuggling, but also content with violent sentiment were assigned to this special category. The existence of such posts indicates that it might be useful for governmental authorities to monitor these Facebook groups more closely, in order to expose criminal actors in Facebook and take actions.

4.8. Description of the categories

While some of the resulting categories should be relatively clear, others certainly need some explanation. In order to give the reader a better understanding of the posts in the different categories, they will be explained in more detail in the following and exemplary posts will be shown. It is important to mention that the exemplary posts are translations from the Google translator, which is why they are not grammatically sound in most cases. The reference number refers to the number of the reference within the specific (sub-)category and is not of further relevance.

4.8.1. Language learning

Figure 18: Category "Language learning" with sub-categories

One in three posts in the six analyzed Facebook groups has to do with language learning. This clearly underlines the argument that language is one of the most crucial issues for refugees during their integration in a new society. Posts about language learning can be divided into five sub-categories, whereas two of them account for the vast majority.
Learning video:

With 19.98%, learning videos make up for one in five postings in the six analyzed Facebook groups. These can be imagined as videos, in which individuals have filmed themselves while they were holding virtual language lessons for others. These videos are free to watch and usually contain information about vocabulary and grammar, but habits, practices and values as well as information about important institutions are discussed as well. Most of the videos focus on a specific topic of everyday life (e.g. public transportation, grocery shopping, love and dating) and the “teacher” presents important vocabulary for these topics. Often, local practices and social norms within these areas are highlighted as well. It must be mentioned that the videos are made by private persons. Mostly these are Arabs who also speak German, but in some cases, such video-lectures are also held by locals in Arabic or English language. On Youtube and in Facebook (videos like these can be posted directly in Facebook groups but can also be linked from Youtube), there are countless of such videos and the number of views, as well as the comments about these videos indicate that they are very much appreciated by a broad community of refugees and by the Arabic community in general.

Group 2 – Reference 2:

All the sentences you need when traveling. An important lesson in everyday life in German. You can always go to the Youtube channel to learn the lesson, more or less, or a larger set of lessons. Comments with at least 1 to continue with the new tutorials (video attached)

Group 2 – Reference 3:

All the sentences you need to visit the doctor. God be with you and all of you evil. A very important lesson in everyday life in German. You can always access the Youtube channel to have the lesson on any or a larger set of lessons that are more or less. Comments with at least 1 to continue with the new tutorials (video attached)

Vocabulary posts:

Another way, in which people help each other in Facebook groups in terms of language learning, is by posting basic vocabulary translations. Similar to the videos, these are typically about one specific topic of everyday life and a number of useful words or phrases are listed in Arabic with the German translation. Together with the language videos, these posts create the most reactions (“likes” and comments), what underlines the appreciation for such kind of information.

Group 3 – Reference 1:

I love you. انا بحبك
I miss you. انا مشتقلك
You are very beautiful. انت جميل جدًا
I love you above all else. احرص على ارتكاب تلك دائماً قرارًا يكون سوف...
Learning app:
In 2.3% of all posts, various smartphone applications are promoted, which help to learn the German language. One of these apps is “StudyBattle:Help”, a smartphone app that was developed by a research group of the Graz University of Technology. The app allows refugees to quickly and efficiently learn important subjects like the German language or mathematics for children in a playful way with quizzes and other competition-based formats, as it says on the website of the Institute for Software Technology of the Graz University of Technology (AIG 2019).

Group 1 – Reference 1:
A simple and fun application to learn the basics of the German language and all about life in Austria. https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=at.tugraz.ist.studybattle&hl=en

Group 2 – Reference 8:
Through our app, they can learn to speak in German, quite simply. Learn German for Arabic Voice app works without Internet and you can learn German and all vocabulary and basics in a few days and without a teacher.

Comment the number 1 for your new letter..

Courses:
In some posts (1.23%), specific German language courses are announced.

Group 5 - Reference 2
In the period from January to February there is a course for the Wii A2 at the Institut in Landstraße. Costs cost 700 euros after passing the exam successfully. He teaches Mr. Victor. I want you to call (telephone number attached).

Group 5 - Reference 2
* An opportunity to express your opinion and speak in German
* We remind you to register in the Worshkop of ÖIF
* To participate register under the link (provided that the German level is minimum B1): www.smartacademy.at/wertevideos

In very few cases (0.16%), people asked for personal help in learning the language. Equally as many posts (0.16%) are about learning the English or Arabic language.
Language learning (other):
Some posts have to do with language but do not fit to any sub-category.

Group 2 - Reference 8

After the permission of Adam, but a question to me, if you think about the products of pork and types of wines by their names in food, it helps us, because, frankly, the functions of the ingredients because of the language or chemical symbols of components buy Viaret have an idea that helps us. And your reward for God.

Summing up, the findings indicate that digital possibilities of language learning are very much used and appreciated by refugees. The potential of social media in this area might still be underrated. Since the organization of on-site language courses for all refugees is immensely challenging and it is hardly possible to provide such courses early and sufficiently for every refugee, digital courses as additional opportunities to learn the language are a great alternative. Refugees can do that wherever they are and at any time, using their smartphones, for example. There are many private people who produce videos or other content that helps others with learning the German language. But also, the provision of professionally produced learning material over a central platform in social media would be a cost-effective approach how the government could encourage refugees in their early stages of settlement and integration. This is undoubtedly an area, where social media already has a very positive impact on the integration process of refugees, but the potentials could be exploited even more, not only by private people that want to contribute, but also by the government or an NGO, if digital learning material would be provided via a well-organized, central platform.
4.8.2. Accommodation

The second-most relevant topic in the analyzed informal refugee networks in Facebook is accommodation, which is clearly an issue of fundamental importance for this group of people. There are posts from users who search for a place to live and from others who offer the very same. This category also contains general posts – mostly specific questions – about the topic housing.

Accommodation offered:

It might be surprising at first that almost two thirds of the posts regarding accommodation are such, in which people offer a place for others to stay. Considering these posts more closely, it becomes clear that the people that made these posts are looking for someone to share their room/apartment with, in order to divide costs. This is not definitely described in the posts, but the assumption that this is the main motive behind these offers is very obvious. Very likely, other reasons play a role as well, like the need for social contact, emotional and practical support, or simply goodwill. Especially in the case of refugees who usually only have very limited financial means, it can be assumed though, that the cost factor is the main motivation for sharing one’s place to live.

Group 1 – Reference 3:

*Furnished 12 room with one person and needed someone else to share .. A very quiet apartment and clean, close to Meidling main road station on Whatsapp No. (telephone number attached). And a normal contact No. (telephone number attached)*
Group 1 – Reference 12:

Salam aleikum It is a place for a person in a room for two in a youth apartment in the neighborhood 13 room where a person has an empty space The room is ready and the area is hidden and sweet In addition to the garden of the building to connect (telephone number attached)

Accommodation needed:

In 3.87% of all posts, users expressed their need for a place to stay and gave specific requests in terms of accommodation. This share arguably could be expected to be higher, because such requests seem a very obvious way to use social media for one of the most fundamental problems of refugees - accommodation. Interestingly, in many cases, the safety of the apartment was highlighted as a special requirement. This underlines refugees need for a safe environment, also in terms of neighborhood, because ultimately, most of them have left their homeland because they were no longer safe there.

Group 1 – Reference 5:

Linz 4020 I am looking for an apartment for two rooms for rent. Please help me.

Group 5 – Reference 4:

Who knows who has an apartment for one. 21.8.- 12.9. For 4 people with one simple, and the apartment is safe. Please tell me that. And thank you. And peace.

Accommodation (other):

Other posts which regard housing and that were neither offers, nor requests, but rather general questions, account for 2.63%. The following examples demonstrate the problem of the translation of the posts that complicated this study to some extent. In these examples, as in most other cases, the topic was still identifiable.

Group 3 – Reference 2:

- good evening - A question for the experience and experience that I have two years and an address, and I will be in my youth, may I take up the house of the municipal, or not?

Group 5 – Reference 3:

Peace be with you. I live in Wolberberg and my body moved to Vienna and on the day Lucius told me I said: I would have made a house with me or sold, I am a good friend from Vienna. Which organization is responsible? Many Thanks
4.8.3. Individual services offered

Figure 20: Category "Individual services offered" with sub-categories

This category contains all posts in which a person offered a specific service for others. In these cases, people are trying to earn money by utilizing their capabilities, like language skills for offering translation services. The category was divided into four sub-categories: Transportation, translation, services concerning documents and other services.

Services concerning documents:

Most posts in which specific services are offered are about documents. This is the case in slightly more than 2% of the total posts. This sub-category has to be considered with caution, as most of these posts appear to be more organized and targeted towards a broader audience than in the other sub-categories, where the respective services are offered on a more private and individual level. The services of this sub-category usually regard transmission/sending of various different international documents, like academic certificates or passports. While it cannot be ruled out totally that in some cases the offered service is about redirection of real, original documents that have been left home, it is, however, very obvious that in most cases the service is transmission of faked documents. After translating the posts using the Google translator, there are many obvious indications for this. Keywords like “seal”, “certificate”, “high accuracy”, “cheat” or “professional” signify that clearly. In my opinion, this is one reason why measures should be set that enable official authorities to monitor informal Facebook groups more closely and back-trace posts like these, in which possibly criminal actions are declared.
Group 3 – Reference 2:

The official documents are all certified by a jury, and Paul for all Austrian and state universities, Dr. Ing. Abd Al-Hakim. And affordable.

Email: (e-mail address attached)

White Cross alley 6/1/4 2340 mödling Mobile phone number: (telephone number attached)

Group 4 – Reference 1:

Studies and documentations for Syrians and others certified by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Seal made of wood + Certification of tests, universities and externals Competitive prices and high accuracy "br" Contact or request FASER + TASP / on the following number (telephone number attached)

Group 5 – Reference 12:

We have papers for outside. Provides for the Syrian brothers: Communication >> (telephone number attached) << Testimonies Testimonials (#privat #stadtpark #bicycle) We also offer for Brothers #Iraker #international Syrian certificate "#Nineth # Baccalauréat" of State State alswryh # identity. Certificate "#collector #certified #certified #recognize #recognize From the Universities (#im #Homs #Damascus) Certificate of" " Recognized around the world with the original seal 100% cheat fraud and professional. All papers are #EQUIP # DECLARATION # DECLARATION # EXPLANATION # THAT To Inquire: (telephone number attached) whatsapp or contact There is a transfer around the world through the DHL.

Transportation:

In 1,15% of the posts, someone offered transportation for people, but also furniture, in a specific city or area.

Group 3 – Reference 3:

Peace be with you. Delivery within, outside of Vienna plus airport requests for 25 € - to communicate. (telephone number attached)

Group 5 – Reference 2:

Transport all furniture in Vienna and outside of Vienna, there are all kinds of furniture to reach the number (telephone number attached)

Translation:

Language is one of the most crucial issues for refugees in their first phases of integration, a fact that was also clearly underlined by the results of this analysis already. It is not surprising that some people use Facebook groups to offer translation services in exchange for money or just to help others by offering their language capabilities.
Peace be with you brothers and sisters. Ellie has a translation of all interests and state authorities, hospitals, clinics, and schools for children, real estate and city hall in Vienna. It is presented at a symbolic price. Call number (telephone number attached).

I do instant translation for ladies and couples only.

Services offered (other):

There are several other posts (1,4%) in which services are offered that are not about translation, transportation or documents. It must be mentioned that these posts are different from posts in the category “business”, which will be discussed later, insofar as that they appear to be from private people who want to earn some money, while “business”-posts rather seem to be from small companies/organizations or restaurants. This distinction is of course delicate and depends very much on the subjective interpretation from the translation – a problem that is not fully avoidable in a qualitative data analysis of Facebook posts.

Al - Maslawi Al - Kubba Send a message to your Private ready to make food and biscuits

Hello, girls. I am one. Complete eyebrows full for 5 euros and make-up 15

After the admin … pouring and jasmine. Sew and repair all sorts of women and men. His prices, the speed, the speed, the work. Private networking.
4.8.4. Marketplace

In the posts of this category, as the name says, people used the social media platform as a marketplace. Just like there are unique Facebook groups that specifically serve users as a place where they can sell and buy items, also the six analyzed groups are partly used for this (5.1%). Refugees arrive in a country far from their home and basically start their lives from scratch, equipped with nothing but their most essential belongings. It is therefore not surprising that many of them use Facebook groups to sell or buy important items for their everyday lives.

**Item needed:**

Social media provides the opportunity to easily tell a broad community that you are looking for a certain thing or that you are offering something that someone else might need. Especially for refugees, this is very advantageous because they are often not familiar with local markets and shopping opportunities, and might not yet have a bank account and a credit card, or even a registered residence, in order to being able to buy certain items online. In 1.32% of all posts, someone expressed their need for a certain item.

**Group 6 – Reference 5:**

*Salam alaikum, a good fridge is needed at a reasonable price if the telephone numbers are cut off from comments or you give me the number (telephone number attached).*

**Item offered:**
There are almost three times as many posts in which items are offered (3.78%), than such in which someone searches for a specific item (1.32%). This indicates that often, quick need for money causes users to try to sell some of their belongings. Facebook groups have a broad reach and offer the immediate possibility to get in contact. Therefore, using such groups as a marketplace is very direct and uncomplicated way for refugees to buy essential items or to exchange such for money.

**Group 3 – Reference 6:**

*Sofa for sale price 120 euros. For those interested.*

### 4.8.5. Business

This category summarizes all business-related posts.

**Figure 22:** Category “Business” with sub-categories

**Shop / office location offered:**

In few posts (0.57%), it was announced that a specific shop or office location was offered for sale or rent. These posts obviously reach for people who plan to be entrepreneurs or restaurant owners, which might be a reasonable consideration especially for refugees, as they face special hurdles in the labor market.

**Group 1 – Reference 1:**

*For company takeover and sale. The office of the fifth is ready, right on the way-street. Address is margareengürtel 52. 50 meters distance and rent 650 euros. Such as an office, a café, a salon,*
a supermarket, a supermarket or Central. Price for 14,000 euros and burnt. Contact and communication.

Group 3 – Reference 1:
*Barber shop for rent with full electronic contact equipment from (e-mail address attached)*

**Business (other):**

Most of the other posts regarding business are promotions of special offers or business openings, mostly announcements of Arabic restaurants. In contrast to posts which were assigned to the category „Individual services offered“, these posts can rather be seen as advertisements for a actual businesses rather than as promotions for individual services to earn some extra money. Also, it has to be mentionend that, even though these posts serve a commercial purpose, they were not assigned to the category „Spam – Commercial posts“ because of their thoroughly useful informational content and because they are not recurrent again and again in any of the investigated groups.

Group 3 – Reference 8:
*We are not the best, but we will help you. Here is the castle .. Huge and well worth it.*

*Castle Restaurant Restaurant Castle. Laxenburger Straße 80 1100 Vienna .. (telephone number attached) Thanks for the.*

Group 1 – Reference 4:
*We have a special clearance sale for all Arabs. Carpets - curtains - leather clothes. As we offer our services. For the kitchen. Rent blankets. Tables in all sizes. Eslamgasse2, 1030 Vienna*

### 4.8.6. Religious posts

3,94% of the analyzed posts contain specific religious. Mere opening or ending phrases like „God bless you“ or „May god do you good“, which are very common in statements among Arabic people, have not been included in this category.

Group 1 – Reference 2:
*“Lord, you are greater than happiness, greater than this impossibility, greater than this complexity, and larger than this heap, you must trust and you are the best agent.”*
4.8.7. Employment

Employment is not only an essential factor in every society, but also a major domain within the field of integration. It is therefore surprising to me that only 3.95% of all posts regard this topic. The category is divided into three sub-categories. One sub-category covers posts in which people search for work (0.49%), one summarizes posts in which entrepreneurs aim for finding employees (2.06%) and the third sub-category contains general questions and statements about employment (1.23%). It has to be mentioned that, similar to the problem in the category „accommodation“, it was sometimes difficult to tell from the translation whether in a post a person asked for a job or a job was offered. In an example about a barbershop, for instance, it was not fully clear whether a person with experience as a barber asked if there was a barbershop that hires, or whether a barbershop owner declared that they were looking for a new employee.

**Employment needed:**

As already indicated, refugees face special hurdles in the labor market. Usually, they lack important competences in the home country language, which is an essential factor for finding and executing a job. Another major problem for refugees is that they are often not able to proof their education and job experience, either because they cannot provide the documents, or because employers are unwilling to recognize them as such. Because of reasons like these, refugees use informal networks in Facebook as an additional way to find a job.
Employment offered:

Many posts are targeted towards the broad community of refugees in the Facebook groups, in order to find workforce. In most cases, these job offers are positions in Arabic restaurants, but also other jobs in the service and the IT sector, as well as technical professions are offered. Indicated by the language, in which the posts are formulated, it can be assumed that those offers are mostly from entrepreneurs with Arabic origin, or maybe even from refugees themselves who decided to become entrepreneurs. However, it is also imaginable that in some cases, small local businesses utilize informal refugee networks in Facebook as an additional source of potential employees.

Employment (other):

Other posts which are neither job offers, nor statements form refugees searching for a job, but still have to do with employment, were summarized in a separate sub-category. These posts are for example news about important companies in the Austrian labor market, or general questions about regularities and procedures regarding employment.
**Group 5 – Reference 2:**

_Salam Alaikoum … A quick question, if I have to work with a company of Halal companies, I've heard that education is required three years after your permission, if I end up trying or working with a company of companies that work for us help, and I have to work to get a work contract …

God rewards you well

4.8.8. Flight

The category „flight“, to which 3.7% of the analyzed posts were assigned, has to be interpreted with caution regarding the sub-categories, because the interests in the respective posts are fairly different.

![Figure 24: Category "Flight" with sub-categories](image)

**Help, information needed:**

A small part of this category (0.57%) is made up by posts in which people ask for help or information regarding fleeing. These posts contain for example questions about specific routes, but also desperate help calls for being rescued from a certain unsafe area.

**Group 1 – Reference 2:**

_Peace be upon you, you can help me save me from Gaza, and I need your help. Help from the good people I need to make the 31 home alone, I am the father, the 4 brothers, my brother, who fell the roof of the house, and I implore you to give you one good month to God helping me to help me speak with me_
Group 1 – Reference 4:
Peace be upon you guys. I have only one question, if there is any idea or possibility to cross the Montenegro in Croatia, and thank you very much.

**Human transportation, hauling, visa, etc. offered:**
The major part of this category, consists of posts in which smuggling or hauling of people is offered and a visa in the destination countries is promised. In total, this sub-category makes up 3.13% of all analyzed posts. In most cases, tempting costs are highlighted. It is a sub-category of posts that contain highly doubtful content and another reason for my recommendation to governmental authorities to monitor posts like these in Facebook groups more closely. There are indices that some of the submitters of such posts could be engaged in illegal actions like people smuggling. Also, from the viewpoint of the refugees who feel adressed by such posts, it is highly questionable whether these offerings are serious or rather fraudulent.

Group 1 – Reference 7:
*Salam alikoum* We have a possibility to convert Masari from Kuwait to Vienna and the price is acceptable

Group 5 – Reference 3:
Peace be with you. I have a pilot plane on 8.10.2017 from Vienna to Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Very tempting price.

Group 6 – Reference 6:
*International freight (with freeing). From Istanbul, to all countries of the world. A cell phone and from all countries of the world: (telephone number attached)*

### 4.8.9. Events

Events can be good opportunities for refugees to link up with locals as well as with other refugees. Facebook groups are often used to promote events because of their great reach and because the social media platform provides functions to organize such. In 3.53% of the analyzed posts, someone made use of this opportunity. The promoted events can be divided into sports events like soccer tournaments (0.58%), events for children (0.74%) and other events (0.58%). Almost half of the events were organized and promoted by local people or organizations. These were also assigned to a seperate sub-category.
Sports events:
Group 6 – Reference 3:

Peace be with you. We return back to Vienna and to all of our Arab and Kurdish communities in Austria, the ones representing the community of loved ones and brotherhood in 21.05. He shared 16 teams and all around on the title and the details of the tournament are the following:

Each team consists of 7 players + caution. The conditions for the tournament. Trophies.

First place: 1st shirt and engagements engagement team Ljym' team and glass
2nd place: 100 Euro + cup
3rd place: Red Bull range

And of course, there are a couple of awards for the best player and the best guardian of the tournament. Together 100 euros.

And for more details, you can join a private conversation or contact this number in Watts or (telephone number attached). You can not leave her until the places are over, and thank you.

Events for children:
Group 5 – Reference 1:

Happy to have you all 🌹🍀🌹 A new activity that makes a peaceful, children's organization ...

When the weekend and the kids take the house out of school ...

It's a distraction, and it's just that it's only Saturday and Sunday. For children under 15 years follows the Byqdrwa from 9am and the activities are various activities for some easy competitions
in math, english and german. For the children of 15 and over 15, they are in the afternoon and in an Austrian organization, which means that when they ask what they say about math, English and German, they are like one.

The hall is on. At the station U1 .... Places are limited to sending a message to the organization's website.

Events (other):

Group 1 – Reference 1:
The majority of our nation suffers from sluggishness, laziness, and surrender, which may be due to the weakness of motivation, which is the main reason for motivation to work. Laurenzerberg 2 (1010 vienna) - Austria. Corner U1, and U4 ....... at 10 o'clock ... may the break before our thirst for the other friday 17/11 clock branches

Group 2 – Reference 2:
happy everyone. We are back on vacation to meet with you every Friday to get the coffee from 3 o'clock to 5 o'clock. The same address on U3 🚇 Kardinal Nagl Platz, Dietrichgasse 49 Stiege 6

Wait for you ☺✌🇦🇹

Events organized by local organizations:

Group 1 – Reference 1:
An opportunity to participate in an interactive workshop on Austrian values organized by ÖIF on 18.10.2017 from 9:45 till 16:00. A video will be produced on the workshop.

Group 3 – Reference 1:
The organization asks for the annual ceremony on human values, such as freedom, justice, and Msawił between the human being, who includes the elite of Austrian society and with. Location: Kursalon Bad-Voeslau, Waldwiese 2, 2540 Bad-Voeslau. Time: 10/10/17. The invitation is public.

4.8.10. News
In 3,45% of the analyzed posts, news or links to online newspaper articles are provided. 1,31% are Austrian news about politics or certain happenings and 0,25% are Arabic news of the home countries of many refugees. News that especially concern asylum account for 1,89% of the posts.
Figure 26: Category "News" with sub-categories

**News concerning asylum:**

In some cases, links to specific online news articles are provided or the source is specified in any other way. In most cases, however, the post is stated without provision of the source of the information. This is problematic for the readers, as they can not evaluate the credibility of the given information. Especially in the case of news that concern asylum, this can be a serious issue, as information of this kind might strongly affect individual refugees' decisions and their further actions.

**Group 1 – Reference 4:**

*I have some news for you. The European Court decides to transfer refugees from Austria to Croatia. Saturday 29.07.2017. A new one we want to develop. Supports the program with its participation.*

**Group 3 – Reference 3:**

*The law of foreign law will enter into force in Austria. The laws are aimed at preventing the excesses of housing, asylum and immigration.*

### 4.8.11. Help in specific matters

In this category, all posts are summarized in which someone asks for help in a specific matter, other than just information (3.37%).
Figure 27: Category "Help in specific, individual matters" with sub-categories

**Translation needed:**
In almost every third case (0.99% in total) the user's problem concerns translation, like a specific document that must be translated or the need of a translator for accompaniment to a specific appointment.

**Group 5 – Reference 1:**
We need an interpreter, tomorrow at 10:00, 16:00, 10:00.

**Group 1 – Reference 1:**
Hi, I live in Tyrol, I need a translator to help me.

**Transportation needed:**
In the analyzed Facebook groups, users not only ask for help in terms of translation, but also in terms of transportation, for example when someone is moving to another place.

**Group 1 – Reference 1:**
Salam Alaikoum Wanted transport vehicle within Vienna to transport the purposes of the neighborhood 14 of 13 to connect (telephone number attached).

**Group 6 – Reference 1:**
Salam alaikum A car is required to transport a house in the neighborhood of 20 or neighboring neighborhoods.
Help in specific matters (other):

The remaining posts in this category (2.06%), which are neither about translation nor about transportation were summarized as “other” and regard a variety of issues in which users ask others for help in specific matters.

Group 1 – Reference 3:
*Please share the publication to reach the largest number. Lost the passport of your addiction and the day (to court). My name is Kamal al-Din Rahmani. I hope those who find him to write the page. Greetings Kamal Al Samurai*

Group 2 – Reference 2:
*We need a teacher or a good teacher in the neighborhood. Teaching 3 children is acceptable, and we agree that the rent will be paid for the rent. Telephone number: (telephone number attached)*

4.8.12. Asylum procedures, documents, etc.

Refugees are often very helpless in their new environment and without orientation in bureaucratic issues. Furthermore, language problems are a big obstacle for refugees to build links with local institutions. Therefore, Facebook groups offer a good opportunity for refugees to help and inform each other about procedures, regulations and requirements concerning asylum. Posts that contain questions or statements about asylum procedures and asylum in Austria in general, or about neccessary documents, as well as information about important institutions that are particularly relevant in the first phases of asylum, are summarized in this category and account for 3.04% of all analyzed posts.

Group 1 – Reference 1:
*If you allow me, I would like to live in Austria. It is easy to break the visa in Austria and do a job and not improve and lie down there.*

Group 3 – Reference 5:
*If you allow information to be stopped. If a person has one year (temporary). Can you move from province to province??*

Group 5 – Reference 4:
*In the name of God … Everything that has collected from Austria and the and all this information after a lot of muddling through, a lack of information, empty-handed, after every request for a. Sure, every visit takes days, weeks, and also information that I have gathered from their official pages … now my comments on one of my thematic …. here: www.help.gv.at*

4.8.13. Medical issues

Another very important topic, in which refugees often do not know where to get essential information, is health and medical issues. This category contains mostly posts in which people ask for doctors in a specific medical domain, but also questions about drugstores and about the e-
card, the medical identification card for people in Austria, were assigned to this category which accounts for 2.3% of all analyzed posts. It is especially noticeable that in many cases, it is specifically asked for an Arabic doctor, what could possibly be ascribed to language barriers.

Group 2 – Reference 6:
Salaam Alaikum, guys, if the one address of the doctor for children in the neighborhood 20 and all greetings to all.

Group 5 – Reference 3:
Good evening, the address of the night shift, if she has an idea. pharmacy

Group 5 – Reference 7:
Peace be upon you ... guys in the one, dr. R and Dr. Eyes should be in Vienna. I hope you are an Arab.


Education is another fundamental domain in social life and especially in the field of integration. Refugees often have a high education standard and upon arrival in the new society, many of them want to study and get an academic degree in order to have better prospects in the job market. Considering this, the proportion of posts about studying seems surprisingly small. In only 1.64% of all analyzed posts, someone asked about different study options, about the registration procedure at a certain university or about anything else regarding studying and universities in Austria.

Group 1 – Reference 1:
I would like to say which is the best study in Austria (Graz University of Technology) and study in Germany in terms of life / career opportunities during and after study / permanent residency. Since I know that I am a communication engineer, please answer the importance. Many Thanks.

Group 1 – Reference 4:
Salam Allah to all I am a student from Morocco 24 years with diploma Albaklwya High school graduation in etiquette and business administration office in Morocco the German school and I have a B2 certificate in a few months and would like to study business economics Austrian universities, but I do not know How can I make it possible for those who help me to register at the Austrian university and get the admission, please help me.

4.8.15. Links to supportive websites

Posts which contain links to external websites with useful information account for 1.32% in total. In most cases, these posts were also assigned to another category, depending on the content of the respective linked website. Mostly, these links are from websites like www.iamrefugee.at, www.smartacademy.at or other websites from organizations that provide useful information, language or culture courses or other supportive services.
Group 6 – Reference 7:
https://iamrefugee.at/ar/
Are you an assistant doctor in Austria? - do you have accommodation? Are you studying, working, working or working? Love do you know the management team in German? Do you work voluntarily? Do you know all programs in Austria? Do you know what's new for refugees and immigrants in Austria? Location I am Refugee—all you have potential. Love what others do, share 😊

Group 5 – Reference 2:
* An opportunity to express your opinion and speak in German
* We remind you to register in the Worshkop of ÖIF
* To participate register under the link (provided that the German level is minimum B1): www.smartacademy.at/wertevideos

Figure 28: Screenshot of the website iamrefugee.at – section for asylum seekers

Figure 29: Screenshot of the website iamrefugee.at - section for recognized refugees
The picture above shows the website www.iamrefugee.at, which provides very good basic information about the most essential first steps of integration in a simple way. Visitors of the website can choose between German, English or Arabic Language and there are three sections: One for asylum seekers who are waiting for asylum, one for recognized refugees who were already granted asylum or subsidiary protection and one for volunteers who want to support refugee projects. This website is frequently linked in most of the analyzed Facebook groups.
4.8.16. Political posts

Politics is not a very much discussed topic in the analyzed Facebook groups. Only 0.74% of all posts contain political statements, thoughts or questions.

![Graph showing the distribution of political postings](image)

Figure 30: Category "Political posts" with sub-categories

Demonstrations:

It is important to mention that slightly more than half of the posts in this category are announcements of demonstrations.

**Group 5 – Reference 2:**

*For every Syrian in Vienna .. For the honest people. For our parents, the martyr, for the. The Austria for the support of the revolution. Invites you to participate in the stand up for the protection of civilians in the Dyralzwr under the slogan "stop innocent civilians, on Sunday, 08.10.2017 in front of the Opera from 16 o’clock to 18 o’clock. The address: Hebert-Von-Karjan Square .1010 Vienna*

**Group 5 – Reference 4:**

*Is the message to the 27 thousand Syrians in Vienna: read the contribution for the other. In support of our refugee brothers in the camps in Lebanon and after the recent aggression of the Lebanese army and the terrorist group, the Syrian refugees were killed under torture, many of them ... We invite you to participate in the demonstrations of the Beirut Embassy in Vienna To stop the attacks against the refugees and to withdraw their elements from Syria ..... Everyone must bring “a conscience”. The date and the address will be determined later by a later post office. Coordination is only waiting for approval ...*
Political posts (other):
In other political posts, one user called for an online petition, as seen in the exemplary post below. Another user, for instance, congratulated the newly elected Austrian president. In the example below, someone provided a link to an online-petition with the aim to make Arabic an official Language option in the exam for the Austrian driving license.

Group 1 – Reference 1:
A petition is being submitted to the Austrian Government to write Arabic to pass the exam in Austria. Please sign up and sign.  
https://secure.avaaz.org/ar/petition/petition_59cd3ff0d073b/?cAFVikb

4.8.17. Austrian culture, values
Only very few posts (0,58%) concern Austrian culture and values. Even this small share should be interpreted with reserve, as none of the posts was actually made from refugees themselves discussing the topic, but rather from locals who offer and promote courses about Austrian culture and values. Still, such courses must be seen as important elements in the process of refugee integration as they help to prevent cultural misunderstanding and confusion. It must be mentioned at this place that the community in the analyzed Facebook groups largely consists of Arabs and the common language of discussion is Arabic almost without exception. I argue that this topic would have a higher relevance if the community in such Facebook groups would be more mixed and if more locals would participate in the discourse in social media. This would of course require more users to discuss in German or English language, as far as possible, in order to have a situation where more local people are willing and able to participate.

4.8.18. Information about other destination countries
Equally as few posts (0,58%) contain information about destination countries other than Austria. Posts of this category are especially fraughted with a problem that is omnipresent in social media: Information is provided without a source that would verify its credibility.

Group 5 – Reference 1:
A quaint Swiss village that offers $ 70,000 per family to settle there. Your conditions are not difficult

Group 6 – Reference 1:
In Hungary there are at least 1500 euros for hairdressers

4.8.19. Law
Law is an important pillar of societal functioning, but surprisingly, legal issues were only discussed in 0,58% of the analyzed posts. These few posts consist of information about specific legal regulations in Austria, but also, for example, one person asked for the help of an Arabic lawyer. In
several cases, the hashtag #smart_Anwalt (German for „lawyer“) was used in posts that explain certain legal issues, as in one of the examples below.

**Group 1 – Reference 1:**

> From Sunday 1/10/2017 burka forbids in public places and works in Austria and 150 euro fine.

**Group 2 – Reference 1:**

> After your ears young men and women I need an Arab lawyer ....

**Group 3 – Reference 2:**

> A detailed explanation for the custody of the custody of the child. Thanks #smart_Anwalt

### 4.8.20. School, education

The category with the smallest relevance (at least in terms of frequency discussion) is „School and education“. Only 0,16% of all analyzed posts regard this topic, what is especially suprising as schools are one of the most essential institutions to encourage integration. Education can be understood as a key to a successful, integrated life within a society and also, schools are a place where people build social contacts, not only students but also their parents. A possible reason for the small relevance of this topic in the Facebook groups could be that the choice of a school is not an issue every refugee is confronted with and furthermore it is not an issue of everyday life, in contrast to many of the previously presented categories.

**Group 5 – Reference:**

> Peace be with you, the admin. Oh, nice of you two, for kids and kids. School of course, age 8 and 10 years. I mean, today I have my children I and the director of the school, told me, in a school, the children for two years to lead to or to a battle, and many thanks for all who are tired

### 4.8.21. Other posts

All remaining posts (4,6%) which could not be assigned to any of the previously presented categories were summarized as „other posts“. Among these, topics like driving license (0,25%) or shopping (0,16%) were treated and statements about fate and hope for relatives (0,49%) and thanking words towards the host society were expressed (0,25%), for example.

**Group 6 – Reference 1:**

> Download the theoretical test questions about driving license Austria in Arabic. Write the number 1 in a comment or comment on anything to make the publication accessible to all. The publication was shared by all

**Group 2 – Reference 1:**

> The cuts and weekly offers in the Lidl are in their hands. Please write 3 for everyone benefit 🍉🍅🍓⌚👇👇👇 [http://arabineurop.com/archives/467](http://arabineurop.com/archives/467)
Group 1 – Reference 1:
My brothers, Jay, were fed on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, not from Lebanon, and told me a necessary hope.

Group 2 – Reference 1:
Hello brother, I want everyone to know these children and find them in the sponsor’s area, sitting next to their mother and father, who were killed from the area around Aleppo, his residence. (Photo of two children)

Group 6 – Reference 3:
An application to find out when buses and trains in Austria are using card cards. Put the number 1 in a comment or commented everything to the post for everyone and shares the post for everyone. https://goo.gl/rYfyDr

4.8.22. Undefinable
2,71% of the posts were translated by the Google translator in a way, that did not allow to interpret them meaningfully. English and German language were both used to improve the chances to receive a useful translation. When the subject of a specific post was clear enough, it was assigned to the category „undefinable“ in order to not distort the results.

4.8.23. Dubious / alarming posts
Depending on their content, some posts were assigned to the category „Dubious / alarming posts“. This category involves statements which can be suspected to advocate fraud, for example offers of fake documents or people smuggling. It is not fully clear to me in all cases whether such offers are about fake documents, or rather about the redirection of real documents that have actually been left in the home country or legal replications of such. From my impression, though, it can be assumed very certainly that in most cases the talk is about fake documents. Keywords like „cheat“, „like real“ and „seal“ are exemplary indices that underline this assumption. This special category also involves statements with violent content, even though these cases are very rare. Keywords that are associated with violence helped to detect possible violent sentiments in the posts. In general it can be said that this category represents those posts which are the reason for my recommendation to governmental authorities to monitor informal networks in social media more closely. Event though surveillance is inevitably accompanied by constraints of people’s freedom, these measures should be in the interest of all those who live here together obeying the law and not harming others.
Figure 31: Category "Dubious / alarming posts"

An essential question is, what policy makers would do with the knowledge about such posts. Using their authority to detect violations of the law and protect and prevent desperate refugees from becoming victims of fraudulent schemings is one possibility, which would surely contribute positively to integration in general. Using such individual posts from "black sheep" to stir up fear and hate against refugees in the broad society, on the other hand, would be very dangerous and would contribute to an overall situation in which integration is difficult and can only happen restrictedly.

Group 3 – Reference 2:

Peace be with you. A guy knows the name of the smuggler from Croatia to Austria. Or something that is smuggled out of Croatia.

Group 5 – Reference 10:

Receive a certified and accredited university certificate to improve your education and career status. Establish connection. Tilt: (email address attached) Or the account: (telephone number attached)

Group 5 – Reference 6:


Note: All papers are certified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Syria. Important obligation in the
The implications of the resulting topical composition in the analyzed Facebook groups, as well as especially important categories like spam and dubious / alarming posts, will be discussed in the next chapter. These insights are also the basis for the subsequent closing chapter, in which a practical concept will be recommended that should help to better exploit the positive impact of social media (with the focus on Facebook) on integration.
5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the results from the data analysis will be compared with the findings from Alencar’s (2017) interviews and the similarities and contradictions will be discussed under application of the framework that Ager and Strang (2008) defined. To recap briefly, the framework describes what the authors define as core domains of integration. These are “Markers and Means” (housing, employment, education and health), “Social Connection” (social bonds with family, friends and people from the same ethnic and/or religious group; social bridges to people from different groups, especially local citizens in the context of refugees; social links to local institutions and organizations), “Facilitators” (language and cultural knowledge; safety and stability) and “Foundation” (rights and citizenship). The findings of the analysis are then used to discuss the impact of social media on integration in the different domains and to derive practical measures in order to increase the positive effects in this context.

Alencar (2017, 9) found out in interviews with Syrian refugees who settled in the Netherlands, that social media is used for obtaining information in a variety of areas but that information is often difficult to find and mostly provided only in the language of the host country, what significantly limits the value for refugees. To counteract this problem, people – often refugees themselves, but also locals in some cases – have created groups in Facebook where different issues of daily life can be discussed and information can be exchanged. These groups can be imagined as informal online networks for refugees.

Participants in Alencar’s (2017, 9-10) study argued that social media is not their main source of information for issues like housing, employment, education and health. For information in these areas, individual social contacts are preferred. It was furthermore argued by the interviewees that the focus in social media networks is on more practical issues of daily life like shopping locations, public transportation etc. After analyzing the content of 2587 posts in six different Facebook groups and assigning these posts to different thematic categories, it can be stated that the findings do not fully represent the perceptions of the respondents in Alencar’s study. It was found out that housing is a very much discussed topic in informal refugee networks in Facebook. It is actually the second-most common topic among all posts, which is not surprising as it is a fundamental issue for refugees, especially in the early stages of their settlement. Proper and safe accommodation can be seen as one elementary part of the basis on which integration can thrive. Besides general questions about housing, the vast majority of the posts are such in which people either searched for a place to stay or for a roommate to share the place and divide the rent (and to satisfy social needs most probably). So it can be said that through the participation in informal networks in Facebook, refugees have better chances to find a place to live where they feel well and secure, which is essential for successful integration.

Employment is another domain which is among the most common subjects of posts in the analyzed Facebook groups. Ager and Strang (2008, 169-173) defined employment as one the
“Markers and Means” of integration, because having a job is not only a societal marker that someone is to some extent integrated, but, similar to accommodation, employment is also a necessity for being able to integrate. Having a job, which in the best case represents one’s skills and education, positively affects several other areas which are essential for becoming an integrated part of a society. Financial and psychological well-being strongly depends on being employed. Furthermore, work is normally a setting in which language skills can be improved and relationships can be established, two factors which are both highly important for integration. In the posts regarding employment, it was either stated by someone that they are searching for a job, or it was announced that a company or a restaurant was hiring someone. General questions about working life were also asked, but that was rather the exception. For refugees, it can be very difficult to take a foothold in the labor market. Often, they are well educated and have valuable skills which they have acquired in their profession before they fled from their home country, but they might find it difficult to provide proof of that and to find employers who realize and appreciate that. Facebook groups are good a starting point to make progress in the “new” life by providing refugees additional chances for finding a job, regardless of the requirements – be it a job as a waiter or as an engineer.

Health is not among the most common subjects of discussion in the analyzed Facebook groups, but it is still relevant in some of the posts. When refugees are confronted with medical issues, they often do not know who to consult and where to go. This can not only be frustrating, but also dangerous. It turned out in the analysis of the posts that questions about medical issues are not very often asked, but if so, the matter is more serious than in most of the other posts. When it comes to health, refugees mostly use the discussion in Facebook groups to find out about doctors in specific medical domains. It turned out that refugees often specifically ask for Arabic doctors, which once again underlines the problem of language barriers. Other questions about medical issues were asked as well, like locations of drugstores or questions about the e-card, the medical identification card in Austria. The benefit for refugees is the broad audience which they reach with their questions when they use informal refugee networks in Facebook. Especially due to the importance of medical issues, this is a great relief for refugees, because chances are good that their questions will be answered quickly. It has to be mentioned, however, that for information of that kind, in most cases the use of a search engine like Google is enough to get reliable information immediately. This could partly explain why there are not more posts regarding medical issues in the analyzed Facebook groups.

The last domain of the “Markers and Means” of integration is education. As the respondents in Alencar’s (2017, 9) study already indicated, this is indeed a relatively irrelevant subject of discussion in informal refugee networks in Facebook. Especially for refugees, education is an essential mean to build up a good life. Considering this importance and the fact that many of them already have a high educational standard which they could further expand, it seems surprising at first that this topic is so underrepresented compared to others. Arguably, education could be considered as something that is not one of the issues with top priority in the first phases of
integration, but rather something to which refugees devote when more fundamental issues are already regulated and when they feel ready. From this perspective, the rareness of posts about education is not so much surprising anymore. It could be that this issue is more relevant when refugees are already integrated to some extent and thus less reliant on information from social media. Also, it can be argued that universities most probably provide information on their websites at least in English language and therefore there is already a good and obvious source of information. Still, some refugees use Facebook groups to ask others about different study options in specific cities, about the registration procedure for studying, and other issues.

In summary, the findings of this study regarding the relevance of social media in the domains of “Markers and Means” of integration do not fully match those of Alencar (2017, 9). While she came to the conclusion that in these areas, social media was not very much used by refugees as a source of information, my analysis of actual posts in informal refugee networks in Facebook indicates quite the difference.

In the areas of “Social Connection”, various functions of social media platforms and applications have relevance in the context of integration. For social bonds, which are very important for refugees’ emotional well-being and can help to prevent feelings of loneliness and depression, Alencar (2017, 10) highlights the possibility to communicate with friends and family and the possibility to organize events on Facebook, for example. The chat function, an essential element of most social media applications, was not included in my analysis. With this function, refugees can easily stay in contact with family and friends from their home country, independent from where they are across the world, text each other and send pictures, which was not possible in former times. Furthermore, contact with newly met local people can be held more easily. Unquestionably, this function is a great enrichment for refugees in their integration process, but this element of social media was not in the focus of this study and will not be discussed further. The usage of Facebook groups to organize events, that should bring together refugees and locals, can indeed be confirmed. The possibility to organize, announce and promote events in Facebook was found out to be willingly used by refugees, in order to bring together people and establish new contacts. This is not only relevant for social bonds, relations between people of the same ethnic or religious group, but also for social bridges, connections across different groups like refugees and locals.

Also in terms of social links, social media is highly useful for refugees. Regarding the contact and access to important institutions, refugees normally are at a disadvantage compared to local citizens. This is because of lacking awareness of these institutions, insufficient language skills and a consequent information disadvantage. As already indicated, websites of such institutions often lack user-friendliness in terms of refugees (Benton & Glennie 2016) and generally fail to reach this special target group because information on these websites is often only provided in German and not in Arabic or at least in English language. Because of that, refugees confirmed in Alencar’s (2017, 11) in-depth interviews that they valued social media as a central starting point for finding information regarding social links. This can be confirmed by the findings of my study. About 9% of
all analyzed posts in informal refugee networks in Facebook concern social links. Most of them are questions or statements about procedures or documents regarding asylum and also medical issues are often discussed, like questions about specific doctors. Universities and study opportunities are also treated in some posts and in rare cases, links to organizations that support refugees are provided. Concluding, it can be said that social links, with almost one in ten posts, have high relevance in informal refugee networks in Facebook, even though not as much as other domains, especially the following.

Language and cultural knowledge, along with safety and stability have been summarized as “Facilitators” in the framework of core domains of integration by Ager and Strang (2008, 181-184). Problems in these areas pose severe barriers for refugees and efforts consequently facilitate their integration process significantly. As already indicated by Alencar (2017, 11), Youtube is a phenomenal example where social media has an impact on integration by serving as a facilitator in terms of language learning. There are numerous people who provide language courses via the famous video platform. These courses are usually simple videos where vocabulary or grammar is taught, often focused on a specific topic of everyday life. These video-lessons are very much appreciated and intensively consumed by refugees, as my analysis of Facebook groups shows. One third of all analyzed posts being about language learning, it is clear that this is one of the areas where informal networks in social media have the biggest impact on the integration process of refugees. The vast majority of these posts contain direct provision of language information, either in the form of video lectures or vocabularies with translations in text form. Not only the high amount of these posts, but also the numerous reactions to them indicate that they are very much appreciated and made use of by the audience. When language skills are seen as basic necessity for integration to thrive, as is my personal perception, then it should be obvious that social media has a massive positive impact on integration in this context. It can be said that in terms of language learning, informal refugee network in Facebook help to fill gaps where official measures of policy makers and NGOs fail to provide sufficient support.

In contrast to language, cultural information was only shared very rarely in the analyzed Facebook groups. Still, in many of the language lecture videos, cultural aspects, manners, customs and traditions are also treated combined with the language aspect. The small amount of posts about cultural aspects might be surprising at first, but one explanation that I could imagine could be that cultural knowledge is not as immediately essential as language knowledge. There is no doubt that cultural knowledge is absolutely important, but I suppose that it is not as decisive as language knowledge in order to overcome the very first hurdles in the integration process. When it comes to the other element of “Facilitators” of integration, safety and stability, it is not possible to derive a precise conclusion from the analyzed posts because this area is not directly represented by any of the resulting categories. Rather, my perception of the interaction and the tone among the users is that informal refugee networks in Facebook are a very peaceful virtual space, characterized by mutual support and solidarity. Hardly any insults or disrespectful
comments were noticed during the analysis of more than 2500 posts. Compared to my other experience in social media and especially Facebook, this is something I perceived as overly positive. However, it is not reasonable to infer from this information that social media has a positive impact on refugees’ integration process in terms of safety and stability, as the analyzed Facebook groups are all almost exclusively used by refugees and the predominant language of discussion is Arabic. Outside of these groups (which can be seen as more or less isolated networks where only very few locals participate), in social media in general, interactions are much more mixed with locals, with people from other countries and cultures and, most significantly, people with different attitudes towards refugees, migration and integration. In the in-depth interviews by Alencar (2017, 11), several Syrian refugees that have fled to the Netherlands said that they believed that what generally happens in social media does not reduce racism and discrimination but might rather reinforce negative stereotypes about refugees and the Islam. It was also stated, however, that there is believe that social media principally had the potential to contribute to a positive change in this area. I share this believe and I think that it not so much depends on the tool itself, in this context social media applications, but rather on the users of the tool. The opportunity to organize and promote events – like events for intercultural interaction and dialogue where refugees and locals come together – is a good example how social media can have a positive impact on a peaceful coexistence with mutual trust and understanding. In my perception, this is what the domain “safety and stability” is about. This is not just a theoretical opportunity; such events have actually been found relatively frequently in the analyzed Facebook groups.

With regard to the last domain of the framework, “Foundation”, which includes the topics rights and citizenship, not very much information can be derived from the analysis. Few posts are about law issues, but besides to that, not much was found relevant for this domain. It is rather an issue of nation, culture and political environment and the relevance of social media is limited here in my opinion.

The following figure should close this chapter and sum up what has been discussed before. It shows the areas in which social media, or more precisely, informal refugee networks in Facebook, were found out to have a positive impact on the integration process of refugees in Austria. The impact is visualized in the figure by the colors (green: positive impact; red and yellow: negative impact; grey: no impact) and by plus or minus symbols.
The study showed that in the areas employment, housing, education and health, Facebook groups are used as a place for exchange and as a source of information, while websites and other official sources often fail to reach this special audience. Employment and housing are topics of higher relevance than education and health, at least in terms of frequency of discussion.

Social connection is the area in which the emergence of social media has arguably brought the most advantages for refugees. The possibility to hold contact to friends and family in other places in the world and to establish new contacts to locals is of fundamental value for refugees. The focus of this study was on informal Facebook groups from and for refugees. While these groups have a very positive impact on refugees’ ability to establish and maintain such contacts, the impact on social links (connections to important institutions in the destination country) is even higher here. Again, informal networks are used for exchanging information about such institutions (departments, medical institutions, universities etc.), because refugees are often not aware of them in the first place or do not know where to find the information they are looking for. Social bridges and social bonds are more affected by other elements of social media, like (video-, voice- or text-) messaging or the ordinary newsfeed in Facebook, which were not in the focus of this study.

Language learning is the most relevant topic in informal refugee networks in Facebook. Provisions of learning videos and vocabulary translations are omnipresent and are very much appreciated by the community, which is indicated by the users’ comments and reactions. Again, social media is an aid for refugees in their integration process in a domain where official policies and programs do not support them sufficiently. In some of such videos, aspects of the Austrian culture are also delivered. Except for that, cultural knowledge is rather a side issue in the discussions in such Facebook groups.

In terms of safety and stability, a possibly negative impact is suspected, which depends more on the users of the available applications, however, than on social media per se. Fraudulent posts which might mislead refugees in desperate situations are a serious issue in informal networks in Facebook. Such posts could cause individuals to make bad decisions and take undesirable
actions. Insults or posts with violent sentiment were found very rarely. However, outside these rather isolated networks, statements and the tone in Social Media rather have a negative effect on refugees’ perception of safety and stability.

Regarding rights and citizenship, I argue that social media does not play a considerable role. Spam posts, which unfortunately are omnipresent in these networks, weaken the positive effects in all areas, which is why they are demonstrated in the figure above as a red layer covering the whole framework. These spam posts lead to doubt in the credibility of the content in general, and furthermore make it more arduous for refugees to interact and gather information in these Facebook groups. Consequently, it can be said that spam posts reduce the overall benefit of such networks.

5.1. Recommendations

Summing up the previous chapter briefly, refugees can benefit a lot from informal networks in Facebook. The biggest impact was seen in the areas language knowledge and social links, but also in terms of social bonds and social bridges such networks offer valuable new possibilities. With regard to the areas employment and housing and to a minor extent education and health, Facebook groups are an appreciated source of information for refugees whereas official sources often fail to reach this special target group. In all these areas, it is evident that informal networks in Facebook have a positive impact on the integration process of refugees. This impact is, however, significantly limited by the following four circumstances:

1. There exists a vast amount of such informal refugee networks which are organized as Facebook groups and often focus on a specific city or area. They vary in the number of members and in the frequency of interactions but basically they all have the same purpose: To serve as a place where refugees can exchange information about important issues of everyday life in their new environment and discuss current topics of special relevance. In my opinion, the fact that there are so many of these groups reduces the overall benefit of the original idea because the target audience spreads across many different groups. I argue that, because of this, important information often does not reach big parts of the target audience, even though it would be highly useful for all. A unified approach, for example a single, centralized platform, where as much users as possible would participate, would lead to more mixed discussions and thus create more information and benefit in my opinion.

2. The analysis showed that informal refugee networks in Facebook are cluttered with posts that are recurring again and again in exactly the same form, and/or that are not in any way valuable for the community. In most cases these posts are not in line with the original purpose of the Facebook groups – to exchange information about important issues of everyday life for refugees in their new residence. Such “spam” posts are usually simply
ignored but still are perceived as annoying elements that make it more troublesome for the users to navigate through the group and find the information they are looking for. Furthermore, spam posts negatively affect the overall credibility of the information shared in these groups.

3. As just indicated, the credibility of the content in the Facebook groups is often a problem as sources of the given information are only rarely provided. Fake news and false rumors can be a serious problem, especially when it comes to essential issues concerning asylum. Especially when it comes to promising information for people in desperate situations, what often applies for refugees, euphoria and hope can outweigh good sense and rationality. Therefore, it can be argued that unverified information on social media holds the danger to mislead people, especially those in desperate situations. Information of this kind might particularly affect refugees’ decisions about their further courses of action, which is why I see a severe problem in this. In my opinion, some sort of review-mechanism that would verify the given information could improve the benefit for refugees a lot because they could be able to rely on what they read.

4. Another circumstance that limits the positive benefits of informal refugee networks in Facebook is that there is hardly any participation of local citizens. This is because these groups are not directed towards locals in the first place and because the language of discussion in these groups is Arabic almost exclusively. This is of course a big hurdle for locals to take part, even though they could communicate in German or English as well, but as the analysis of the groups showed, such cases are very rare. I am convinced that there are many locals who would want to contribute to the discussions, provide practical information for refugees and answer their questions. More content in German language in these networks could furthermore have a positive impact on the users’ language learning progresses.

In the following, a concept will be presented, which would be suitable to tackle the just mentioned deficits and lead to a significantly more positive impact of refugee networks in Facebook for all involved. First, it must be mentioned to whom these recommendations are addressed. In the best case, the following concept should inspire Austrian policy makers, especially the responsible minister, in taking measures to improve the integration (and the conditions for integration) of refugees in Austria. Unfortunately, it is highly questionable if this paper ever reaches this audience and if so, thinking of the current government’s policies and statements regarding refugees, migration and integration, it is doubtful that the following recommendations would find their approval. However, this should not be ruled out beforehand and the recommendations resulting from this study should be available, not only for the Austrian government but also for any government, organization, NGO and private person in any country, because the concept could equally be adopted elsewhere,
given that the conditions regarding informal refugee networks in social media are similar to those described in this study. The concept could be turned into reality not only by governmental policy makers, but certainly also by (non-profit) organizations or private project investors.

The concept that will be explained in the following should enhance the positive impact of social media on refugee integration by removing the above mentioned drawbacks of many individually organized informal networks in Facebook. The basic idea is to substitute the big diversity of such Facebook groups by one central, official and well organized platform. The idea is that this platform should be a well-known and a much used place for interaction for as many refugees and locals as possible. For this intention, many efforts as well as specific characteristics of the platform are required. The platform could very well be organized as a Facebook group or page. This would make sense because the user-traffic and therefore the likeliness for individual users to join and interact would arguably be much higher in Facebook than if the platform would be organized as a website or smartphone app. The overall value of benefit of such a platform is very much determined by its number of users as well as its “life span”. These factors, again, depend on several other determinants like marketing efforts, word-of-mouth recommendation (dynamics that are hardly plannable and controllable) and of course the actual characteristics, the quality and the perceived value of the platform for its users. The strategy how such a platform – once created – should reach out to the people, grow in influence and member size and become well established is something that is not part of this concept. Only the actual characteristics are described in the course of this recommendation.

To ensure that spam posts as well as fake news and rumors that harm the overall perceived value and credibility of the network are kept as low as possible, clear rules and intensive moderation is required. Because of this, one fundamental necessity for such a network to function properly is a team of professional supervisors that monitor the posts and the discussions and that intervene whenever the rules are not obeyed. The job of these supervisors would be to filter out and delete spam posts, fake news and in general posts with inappropriate content that are not of any informational or other value for the users of the network. Other forms of intervention could be to actively make users aware of the rules and to keep a positive tone in discussions. Another task could be to check and verify given information from certain posts and provide sources, if possible, or to flag given information as false. The comment function of Facebook posts is a good opportunity to add such information, which is then visible for all users. This function could even be used to provide translations from Arabic to German (and vice versa) of the posts or at least of certain posts which are of special importance. This would have two positive effects: First, it would encourage language learning efforts of the users when they could comprehend how certain Arabic statements can be formulated in German, and second, it would enable more locals to be part of the network and participate in the discussions. This would require supervisors who have sufficient knowledge of both, German and Arabic language. Less preferable but still possible would be the usage of a translation tool like the Google translator. Such tools, however, often produce
inaccurate translations, which is why human translators would clearly be better. People who have fled to Austria from an Arabic country and who have already acquired advanced knowledge of the German language would therefore be suitable for this job, also because they have a lot of sensitivity in aspects that matter for refugees, due to their own experiences. Consequently, it is highly recommendable to create a mixed team of supervisors that consists of locals and refugees with advanced knowledge of the host-country language. In addition to the possibility to provide translations through the supervisors, there should be a clearly constituted principle of the network that should encourage the users to communicate in German as much as possible. The just mentioned tasks are highly work intensive and so this implies that the supervisors would have to fulfill their tasks on the basis of a usual employment contract. It would be reasonable to create student jobs, for example. Anyway, I think it is very unlikely that such a network could function properly when the just described tasks would be carried out by a team of supervisors on a voluntary basis.

Another advantage of a centralized and professionally supervised network would be that it would bring more control over criminal actions. People who offer or promote illegal trade of documents, forgery or people smuggling, for example, could be detected and prosecuted. Even though it must be expected that most of the people who engage in such criminal actions would avoid to post about it in an official and supervised Facebook group, it is still conceivable that some of such criminalities could be exposed. Besides that, such a network would make informally organized Facebook groups, where such criminalities are indeed offered and promoted by few “black sheep”, redundant. In the best case, this would lead to a situation where refugees are significantly less confronted with posts that promote things like illegal trade of documents, forgery or people smuggling, which would take the wind out of criminals’ sails.

To sum up, I recommend to Austrian governmental policy makers to establish a central network for refugees in the form of a Facebook group or page, which is supervised by a team consisting of locals and well integrated refugees with advanced language skills, who could fulfill their tasks as student jobs, for example. This network should be characterized by clear rules. The team of supervisors should ensure the compliance of these rules and the maintenance of a good tone in the group. Additional tasks for the supervisors could be the provision of translations, as well as the verification of given information of certain important posts and provision of sources. Translations would support refugees' language learning efforts and encourage more locals to join the network and take part in the discussions. Verifications of the information given in important posts would take away a lot of uncertainty from refugees, as the issues often concern essential factors of their lives. An additional advantage of such a network would be that it would help to tackle illegal actions in Facebook regarding issues like counterfeiting and trading of documents and people smuggling. The actual quality and the perceived value of this network for every user, combined with an elaborate roll-out strategy should ensure that as many people as possible would
join and actively take part and thus make the widespread variety of informal refugee networks with its diverse problems obsolete.

Considering the positive impact that the implementation of this concept would have on refugees’ abilities to manage their challenges in the early stages of integration, as well as on social cohesion, especially in the digital environment, and on governmental authorities’ overview over what is happening there, I argue that the recommended concept would be a very effective and cost-efficient measure.

Besides that, the findings of this study contribute to bring more knowledge into the young empiric field where refugee integration meets social media.
6. Limitations

While the collected and analyzed data and the impressions that build the basis for the conclusion and the resulting concept recommendation of this study are indeed sound and elaborate, there are still some limitations that need to be mentioned.

One major limitation is that only six different Facebook groups were analyzed, but there are much more of such groups. Therefore, the observed characteristics of the analyzed groups cannot be generalized for all others. Even though the purpose of most other groups can be expected to be very similar, it is possible that in some of these groups the thematic foci are different. Also, it is likely that some of the other existing groups are administrated more thoroughly, which would increase the perceived quality and the benefit for its users. Another limitation is that the 2857 posts that were analyzed in the course of this study reach back until 2016 in some cases. Part of the data is therefore not very current, but neither is it outdated or less valid in my opinion because the fundamental issues that refugees are confronted with have not changed since then. A factor that limits the findings more in my opinion is the fact that the analyzed posts were translated from Arabic language using the Google translator. This implies that the results are not as precise as if the posts would have been translated by a human. In many cases, subjective judgement was necessary in order to assign vaguely translated posts to thematic categories. Often, small indices like keywords led to the assumption that a post belonged to a specific category. In few cases, posts were excluded from the analysis when no meaning could be found out through the translation. Finally, it must be mentioned that this study only focuses on Facebook groups even though the title says “social media”, but Facebook is only one of many different applications. However, several interviews in the beginning of this study strongly indicated that Facebook groups are by far the most relevant digital places of forum-like discussion and search for information for refugees. This area of social media is especially relevant for refugee integration in my opinion and at the same time it is well suitable for a scientific analyzation. Even though the results of this study cannot be generalized for all social media applications, they apply for a very central section in this digital environment.

A general factor that has to be kept in mind is that individuals differ in the way and intensity they use social media. Cultural and socioeconomic factors such as age, level of education, cultural background, communication styles or certain attitudes (e.g. towards integration) can cause differences with respect to social media use. Next to more individual factors, also factors of the surrounding environment can have influence in this area. Sociopolitical conditions like integration policies, the host-society's attitude towards immigration, labor market conditions, etc. can influence migrants' media practices (Chen 2012, 4). Because of that, it can be said that social media use and practices are not only different among individuals, but also across different host societies.
Despite the just mentioned limitations, this study resulted in the recommendation of a concept for a cost-efficient measure that could support refugees significantly, especially in their early stages of integration. Better integration of refugees would clearly be beneficial for the society as a whole and furthermore, the concept would help to tackle criminal actions that are organized, offered and promoted in social media.

Besides the recommendation of this concept, this study brings new insights to the empirical field of social media and refugee integration. Above all, it indicated that much more research is necessary in the combined fields of social media and refugee integration, which is an intersection that will continue to be of high importance in the future.
List of references


