



# GERMANWINGS 9525: THE FIRST 6 HOURS

## DIGITAL CRISIS ANALYSIS

25-03-2015

BRENDAN HODGSON + AHMED ALSHARIQI

## GERMANWINGS 4U9525 ~ QUICK FACTS

- **Date of incident:** 24th of March 2015
- **Flight:** Germanwings 4u9525
- **Location of crash:** Massif des Trois-Évêchés
- **Time of crash:** 10:45 CET (Estimate)
- **Fatalities:** 150
- **Aircraft:** Airbus A320



## GERMANWINGS 4U9525 ~ QUICK FACTS

### + Analysis Parameters:

- + First 6 hours following crash – 24-May-2015  
(approx. 11:00 – 17:00 CET)
- + Supplemented by 24 hour refresh – 11AM CET – 25-May-2015
- + Timestamps included in this document are estimates only.
- + **NOTE: this analysis is not intended as a critique of the response efforts of any involved party**





## KEY FINDINGS/CONCLUSIONS

- + As seen during previous incidents, including the Costa Concordia incident (2012), the Asiana Airlines crash at SFO (2013), and more recent aviation disasters, the role of social platforms as back-ups to a company's corporate site has become increasingly important. The catastrophic failure of the Germanwings website in the initial hours continues to reinforce the importance of having social platforms in place and an impetus to consider and review existing infrastructure.
- + However, unlike Asiana Airlines, where citizen-generated visuals largely drove the media agenda during the first hours, the immediate lack of visuals transformed this quickly into a media-driven story.
- + The actions taken by three of the key players – Germanwings, Lufthansa and Airbus – to quickly adapt the visual appearance of their website and their social platforms highlights the importance of having clear protocols in place for coordinated brand management in times of catastrophic crisis.
- + The decision by parent company Lufthansa not to adapt/update its corporate website (or oversight in doing so) in the early hours of the crisis highlights a dilemma facing brands associated with, yet separate from, the affected brand. It suggests the question: Was it Lufthansa's responsibility as the parent company to support or reflect the public mood in the early hours of the crisis?
- + The increasing integration of social “outputs” into real-time media stories e.g. tweets or Instagram images etc. further highlights the importance of these channels as opportunities to insert corporate messages into the unfolding narrative.
- + As always, visuals remain a powerful accelerant for social amplification in times of crisis.
- + Click the links for additional analysis of previous incidents: [Costa Concordia](#), [Asiana Airlines 214](#), [US Airways 1549](#) or visit <http://www.slideshare.net/Brendan>

# **ANALYSIS**

---

**BRENDAN HODGSON  
AHMED ALSHARIQI**

# GERMANWINGS ACTIVITY

## + Within the first 60 minutes:

- + Germanwings issues first tweet acknowledging incident & issues update to Facebook
- + At the same time, Germanwings website crashes – remains inaccessible for approx. 2 hours
- + No change to brand colours/logo on social platforms at this time

(Twitter)



(Germanwings.com site)



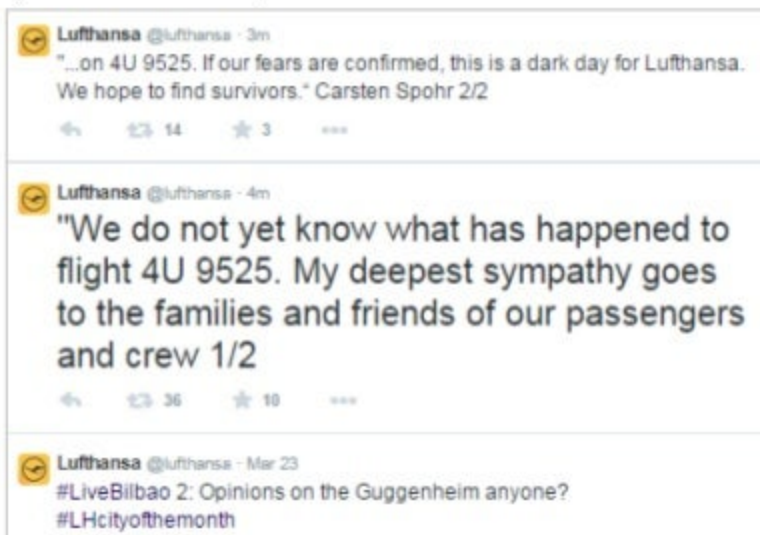
(Facebook)

## LUFTHANSA/AIRBUS ACTIVITY

**+ Within the first 90 minutes:**

- + Within 90 minutes of the crash, Airbus and Germanwings parent company Lufthansa publish first acknowledgements of the incident via Twitter accounts

(Lufthansa Twitter)



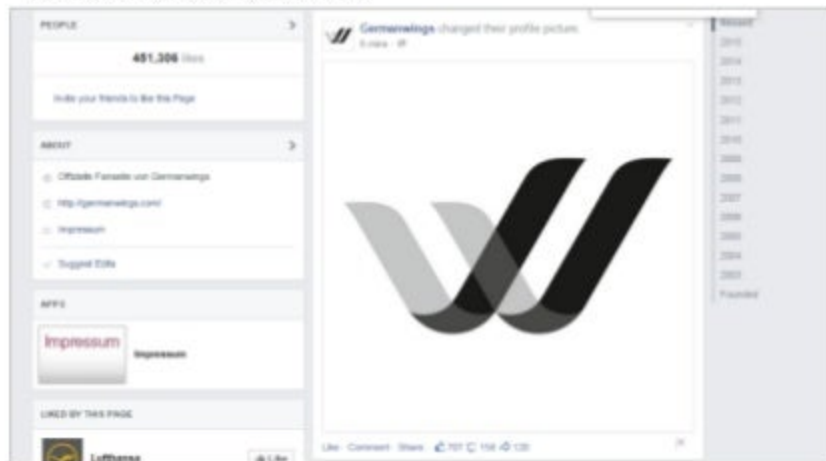
(Airbus Twitter)



## BRAND CRISIS MODIFICATION

- + **Within the first 120 minutes:**
  - + Germanwings recoloured its logo on both its Twitter and Facebook accounts to black and white.
  - + Parent company Lufthansa follows within a similar time-frame with its social platforms

(Germanwings Facebook)



(Lufthansa Facebook)



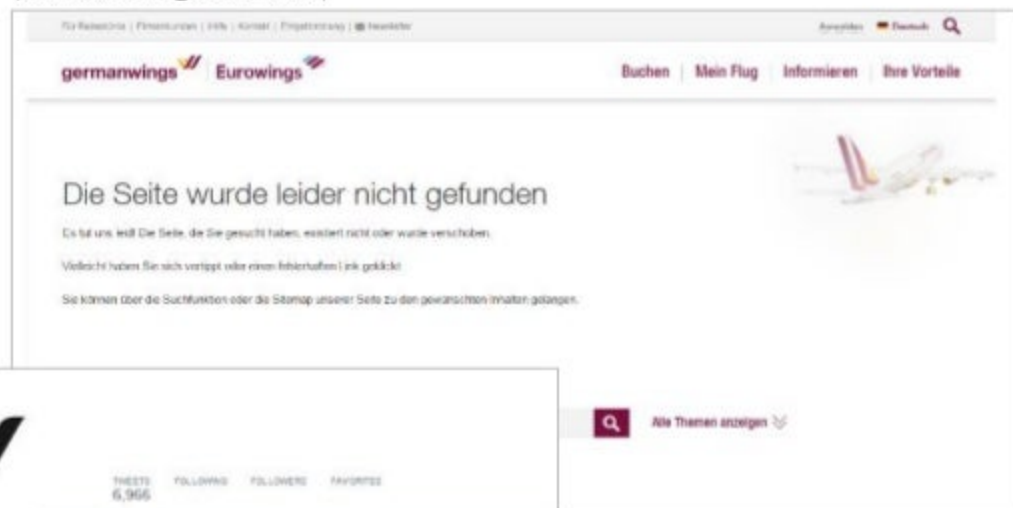


# GERMANWINGS ACTIVITY

## + Within the first 180 minutes:

- + Germanwings site remains inaccessible
- + Within the first hour, Twitter and Facebook become only available points of digital contact with Germanwings

(Germanwings.com site)



(Germanwings Twitter)

# GERMANWINGS ACTIVITY

(Germanwings.com site)

## + Within the first 180 minutes:

- + Germanwings appears to be struggling to re-activate its website.
- + At one point, the original site with full marketing content appears on the site – contradicting its more sombre social platforms



(Germanwings Twitter)

# LUFTHANSA/AIRBUS ACTIVITY

## + Within the first 180 minutes:

- + Airbus wipes brand/marketing images from its corporate website
- + In contrast to its social activity, Germanwings parent company Lufthansa makes no changes to its corporate website during this period.

(Airbus.com site)



(Lufthansa.com site)

**+ Within the first 4 hours:**

- + Germanwings.com begins to stabilize
- + By the fifth hour following the incident, the current crisis site is in place

(Germanwings.com Hour 3)

Die aktuellen Medienberichte sind uns seit kurzem bekannt. Noch liegen uns dazu keine gesicherten eigenen Informationen vor. Sobald bestätigte Einzelheiten verfügbar sind, informieren wir die Medien unverzüglich. Wir verweisen in dieser Situation auf unsere ständig aktualisierte Internetseite [www.germanwings.com](http://www.germanwings.com).

We have recently become aware of media reports speculating on an incident though we still do not have any own confirmed information. As soon as definite information is available, we shall inform the media immediately. Please monitor our website [www.germanwings.com](http://www.germanwings.com) for periodic updates.

(Germanwings.com updates Hour 12+)

Current information

There are 2 new messages.

Recent information

Terminal change at London Heathrow Airport (LHR)

Current information: Flight 4U9525

24th March, 9:30 p.m.:

Following the tragic accident on Tuesday, Germanwings reports occasional flight disruptions within its route network. This is due to crew members, who decided not to operate aircraft today following the reports on the accident of a Germanwings aircraft with 144 passengers and six crew members onboard. "We understand their decision", says Thomas Weiskopf, Management Spokesperson of Germanwings. "Some flight had to be cancelled."

24th March, 1:30 p.m.:

We must confirm to our deepest regret that Germanwings Flight 4U 9525 from Barcelona to Düsseldorf has suffered an accident over the French Alps. The flight was being operated with an Airbus A320 aircraft, and was carrying 144 passengers and six crew members. Lufthansa and Germanwings have established a telephone hotline. The numbers 0000 514 8004 (LHR) and +1 407 362 0032 (worldwide) are available to all the families of the passengers involved for care and assistance. Everyone at Germanwings and Lufthansa is deeply shocked and saddened by these events. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of the passengers and crew members. Germanwings is conducting a full investigation.

Terminal change at London Heathrow Airport (LHR)

back to top

Cologne 18/11/2014

(Germanwings.com Hour 4.5)

[germanwings](#)
[Eurowings](#)

[Booking](#)
[My flight](#)
[Information](#)
[Your rewards](#)

[English](#)

We must confirm to our deepest regret that Germanwings Flight 4U 9505 from Barcelona to Düsseldorf has suffered an accident over the French Alps. The flight was being operated with an Airbus A320 aircraft, and was carrying 194 passengers and six crew members.

Lufthansa and Germanwings have established a telephone hotline. The toll-free 800 11 30 05 77 number is available to all the families of the passengers involved for care and assistance.

Everyone at Germanwings and Lufthansa is deeply shocked and saddened by these events. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of the passengers and crew members.

Departure airport

Destination airport

Travel date

1 ad, 0 ch, 0 st

Search for flight

© 2007 lufh. prices shown are indicative only and subject to change. Prices are by segment. Limited seating capacity. The payments show those with 100% German. \*High Order Card is by description, a surcharge applies.

**+ Within the first 4 hours:**

- + Lufthansa updates corporate home page with a statement on the incident ~ no system failures
- + Statements are updated throughout the day
- + Within 24 hours the corporate site resumes activity with a clear banner to information on the incident

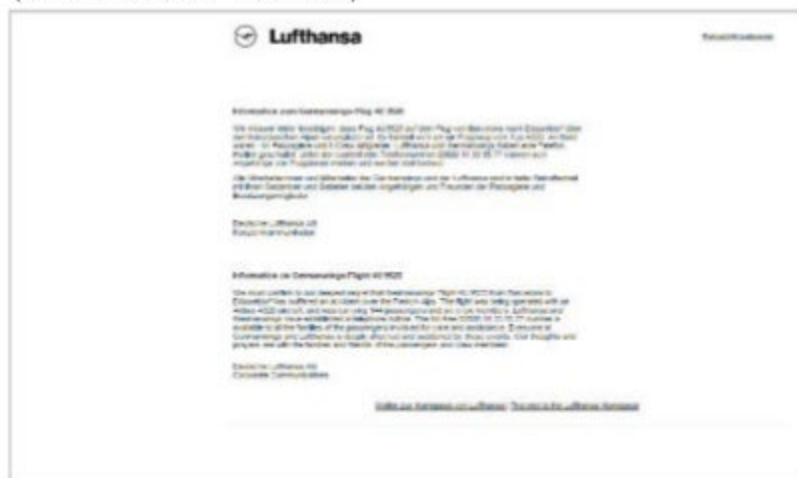
(Lufthansa.com Hour 24)



(Lufthansa.com Hour 3)



(Lufthansa.com Hour 4.5)





# AIRBUS ACTIVITY

## + Within the first 4 hours:

- + Airbus.com incorporates a pop-up notification acknowledging the incident.
- + The pop-up is adapted through the course of the day and within 5 hours links to Airbus' statement on the incident.

(Airbus.com Hour 3)



(Airbus.com Hour 5+)

**GERMANWINGS FLIGHT 4U9525 ACCIDENT IN THE FRENCH ALPS**

Airbus regrets to confirm that an A320 operated by Germanwings was involved in an accident around 11:00 (local time) today near Prato-Haute-Bleone in the French Alps. The aircraft was operating a scheduled service, Flight 4U9525 from Barcelona, Spain to Düsseldorf, Germany.

The aircraft involved in the accident, registered under D-AIPX, was A320 (Manufacturer Serial Number) 147 delivered to Luftansa from the production line in 1991. The aircraft had accumulated approximately 58,300 flight hours in some 45,700 flights. It was powered by CFM56-5A1 engines. At this time no further factual information is available.

In line with ICAO annex 13, an Airbus go-team of technical advisors will be dispatched to provide full assistance to French BEA in charge of the investigation.

The A320 is a twin engine single aisle aircraft seating 150 passengers in a standard two class configuration. The first A320 entered service in March 1988. By the end of February 2015 nearly 6,200 A320 Family aircraft were in operation worldwide. To date, the entire fleet has accumulated some 100 million flight hours in over 60 million flights.

Airbus will make further factual information available as soon as the details have been confirmed and cleared by the authorities for release.

The concerns and sympathy of the Airbus employees go to the families, friends and loved ones affected by the accident of Flight 4U9525.

...

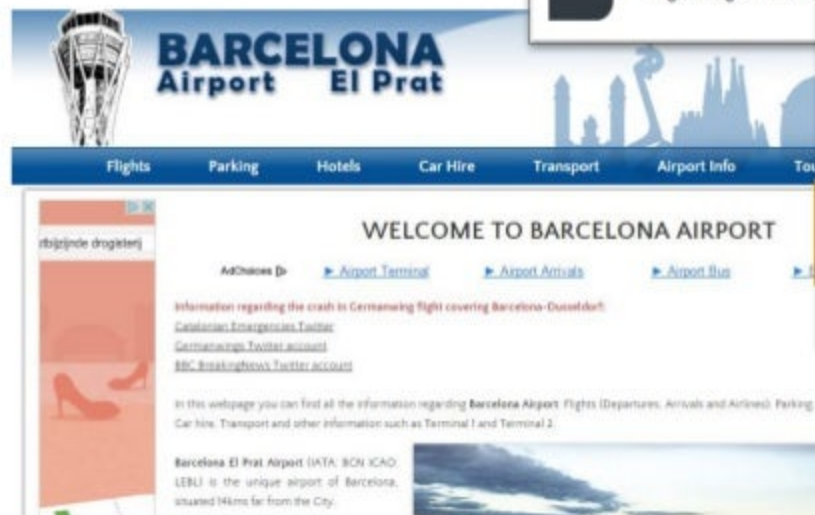
Contacts for the media:  
AIRBUS - MEDIA RELATIONS  
Tel.: (33) 05 61 93 12 80

(Airbus.com Hour 3)



# AIRPORT ACTIVITY

- + It is unclear if Dusseldorf airport experienced a failure, was intentionally disabled or immediately moved to its dark site. However the site remains in a minimal state 24 hours later.
- + Barcelona's El Prat airport made only minor modifications intended to point visitors to specific media and local authorities responsible for the crisis.



Düsseldorf Airport **DUS**

## Aktuelle Informationen

Der Internetauftritt des Düsseldorfer Flughafens ist derzeit nicht verfügbar. Flugunfall: Betroffene wenden sich an die Hotline 0800-7766350. Des Weiteren hat das Auswärtige Amt eine Krisenhotline für Angehörige eingerichtet.

Düsseldorf Airport **DUS**



## Aktuelle Informationen

Der Internetauftritt des Düsseldorfer Flughafens ist derzeit nicht verfügbar. Flugunfall: Für Angehörige werden folgende Nummern eingerichtet:  
Germanwings: 0800-11 33 55 77  
Auswärtiges Amt: 030-2000 3000  
Düsseldorf Airport: 0900-77 66 350

## Important information

The website of Düsseldorf Airport is currently not available.  
An accident: The following hotlines have been set up for concerned persons:  
Germanwings: +49 (0)600 11 33 55 77  
Department of Foreign Affairs: +49 (0)30-2000 3000  
Düsseldorf Airport: +49 (0)900 77 66 350

## CORPORATE ACTIVITY BY THE NUMBERS

## + During the first 24 hours:

- + Germanwings focuses the majority of its digital activity on Twitter – posting in both English (10) and German (14)
- + Germanwings and Lufthansa both see significant spikes in followers on Twitter due to the crash.

Company	Tweets
Germanwings	24
Lufthansa	12
Airbus	5



## CORPORATE ACTIVITY BY THE NUMBERS

### + Financial impacts:

- + Almost immediately following the first reports of the incident, the share prices of both Lufthansa and Airbus fell significantly – however, trading stabilised within ~2 hours after the crash.



## MEDIA / SOCIAL ACTIVITY BY THE NUMBERS

## + TWITTER:

- + One of the first tweets to be posted around the incident came from **Flightradar**, a widely trusted and used website for tracking flights globally.
- + Within the first 90 minutes the tweet was retweeted more than 2,000 times.
- + Within the first 60 minutes, **#Germanwings** had become the top trending topic on Twitter
- + Within the first 60 minutes, according to Sysomos, more than 60,000 Tweets were posted referencing **#Germanwings**



61,546

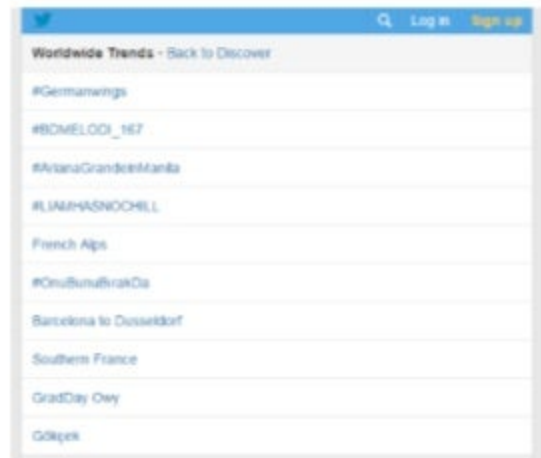
Total Mentions

Overall Mentions

0%

18  
Blogs

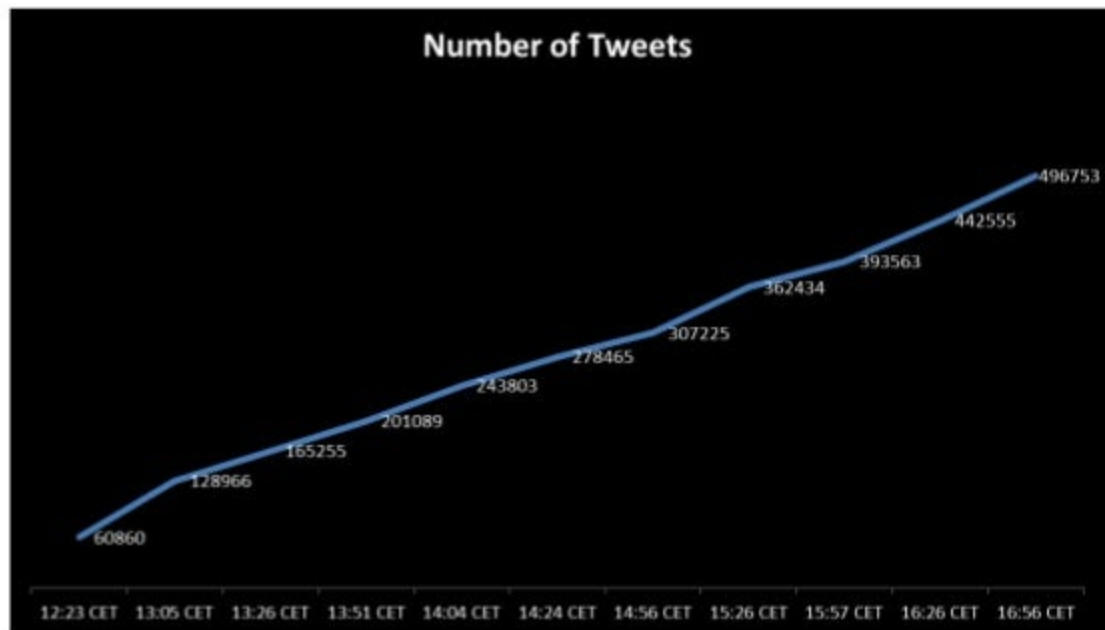
99%

60,860  
Twitter



## MEDIA / SOCIAL ACTIVITY BY THE NUMBERS

- + Within six hours of the incident, the number of tweets referencing **#Germanwings** had reached nearly 500,000 globally.
- + Amid the many expressions of condolences and sharing of news, tweets soon moved toward capturing images of the region of the crash.



## TRENDS AND BEHAVIOURS

- + Due to the initial remoteness of the incident and lack of immediate visuals, fake images and videos began to appear online in increasing numbers.
- + Questions had also arisen due to various early Twitter reports around whether a distress call had actually been made by the pilots.



### Uncertainty over distress call

On the question of whether a distress call was made from the aircraft, the spokesman says the airline has received contradictory reports.

“We have contradictory information about that ourselves, from the air traffic controllers, and we are uncertain as to whether a distress call was issued at all.”

## TRENDS AND BEHAVIOURS

- + As with other recent crises or major news events, the evolution of the live news feed (using tools such as Storify) by media has seen an increased reliance and use of 3<sup>rd</sup> party and eye-witness tweets to supplement reporting – allowing them to provide a variety of comments and reactions by decision-makers, executives, witnesses, experts etc.
- + The implications which have emerged over time – but which must be carefully balanced and applied – are the importance of social channels to drive media coverage and presence within breaking news stories.

**BBC**

Germanwings **tweeted** [5] "We have recently become aware of media reports speculating on an incident though we still do not have any own confirmed information. As soon as definite information is available, we shall inform the media immediately."

# TRENDS AND BEHAVIOURS

- + Within 90 minutes – and despite lack of immediate information – political leaders were quick to react and provide comment on the incident.
- + Francois Hollande was the first of the world's political leaders to comment on the incident.
- + While the French Civil Aviation Authorities have been active through non-digital channels from the outset (e.g. statement to the media), their social media presence was limited in the first hours. A first tweet came almost ~6 hours after the crash. (17:31 CET)





## TRENDS AND BEHAVIOURS

- + Not until the first helicopters had identified and reached the crash site did the story become significantly more visual – providing new momentum for social amplification.
- + Equally powerful, however, have been the emerging images related to the loss of the German exchange students.

