



CONSUMER EXPERIENCE WITH INSTAGRAM FOR BRAND ACTIVATION: AN  
EXAMINATION OF ROADSTER DINER LEBANON INSTAGRAM INTERACTION

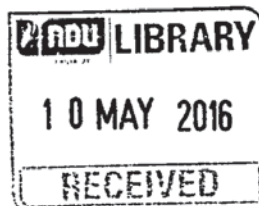
A Thesis  
Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Media Studies/Advertising

by

Maree Ashkar

Department of Media Studies  
Notre Dame University - Louaize

Spring, 2016



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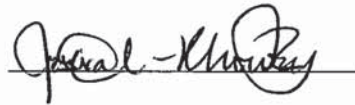
**Thesis Committee:**

*Name*

*Signature of Approval*

*Date*

Dr. Jessica R. El-Khoury



May 5, 2016

Thesis Advisor, Assistant Professor

Dr. Christy Mady



May 5, 2016

1<sup>st</sup> Reader, Assistant Professor

Mr. Melhem Rechdan



May 5, 2016

2<sup>nd</sup> Reader, Instructor

**Department of Media Studies**

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**Abstract**

Brands today have become experience centric where they focus on providing positive memorable journeys with their consumers to allow them to feel anything positive toward the brand, resulting in an emotional engagement. Consumers are also looking for the intangible value they find in brands and not just the tangible product. Their purchasing decision and choice are based on relating to the brand values and personality rather than just needing or wanting the product. With that said, brands need to add value to consumers through perception and brand image. With the focus on Instagram as the visual marketing tool, this study magnifies the human relationship formed via the brand activation with consumers in the virtual world. Moreover the results of this thesis include Instagram being perceived as a prestigious social media tool helping brands understand their consumers' perception of a tool they are engaging with. This prestige encourages use and thus consumers are not only gratified by Rd Instagram use but are also more likely to feel a sense of belonging to the brand and its online community. This connection and use of the new media technology allows for a positive costumer experiences. Thus, brand activation through Instagram is positively associated with Rd consumer experience. In relation to the two-step-flow theory utilized as the base of this study, being an active leader on its Instagram page allows for significant positive relationships with consumer journeys and belongingness with the consumers.

**Keywords:** experience-centric, brand values, brand personality, brand experience, brand activation, emotional engagement.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Communication tools have been evolving with time to reach the intended audience in an innovative, easy and accessible manner. In the 21st century, social media seems to be taking a standing lead in shaping its audience by being omnipresent. For companies to stay contemporary and preserve "top of mind" status, they too have to develop their communication channels to satisfy consumers' needs. With information access (the Internet) consumers are gaining more power through the many communication choices they have without being limited to specific store locations and/or offerings. As Robert Delamar states in his article *Post-Modernism, Electronic Consciousness and Humanness*, "Humanity is the center of the postmodern period; indeed it is helpful to characterize this age as the self centered era" (as cited by Morel, Preisler, & Nyström, 2002, p.2). With the consumer centric society we live in today causing pressure on companies, technical product progress is not enough to win the hearts and/or minds of consumers anymore since it no longer guarantees competitive advantage. . Companies have now noticed this and are focusing on putting their "brand" before "product" (Morel et al., 2002). Living in the era where brands have become experience-centric, consumers are bound to be led on a journey, whether good, bad or indifferent, to provide an opportunity for emotional engagement (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994).

This opportunity for brands to engage in a two-way digital conversation with the audience by being present on social media platforms, allows customers to respond and talk back to the brand and to each other in the most effortless manner possible (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). The new media channels such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook have given users a voice and a "play space" where they can create and easily share online content. In other words, each individual and most importantly each consumer, has the opportunity to become an author,



media producer, and reviewer; they are much more likely not only to have opinions but also share them vigorously in respect to the brand (Malciute, 2012). Subsequently, instead of the brand generally being the one to talk, they now have become the ones mostly talked about (Malciute, 2012). This of course serves the intention and function of Instagram, which focuses on building products to trigger and lure out the creativity in all of us, stated Mike Krieger (2015), technical lead and co-founder of Instagram.

A recent study by Forrester Research found that Instagram users were 58 times more likely to like, comment, or share a brand's post than Facebook users and 120 times more likely than Twitter users (Rezvani, 2015). There is a dramatic shift of users from Twitter and Facebook to Instagram (Rezvani, 2015). Instagram has become a popular tool for businesses through serving as an interesting tool for customer service, sales marketing and PR (Ridinger, 2014), Since consumers are more visually oriented, they enjoy telling their stories through sharing videos and pictures, making Instagram platform a very important social medium for businesses. Content on Instagram is simply more sharable, easier to understand, accessible and far more universal than other types of content. As the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, and what better way to tell your story than a thousand words at a time (Rezvani, 2015).

Considering Instagram as the preferred communication tool, E-consultancy research reflects that Instagram has approximately over 300 million monthly active users with an overall 30 billion photos being shared via the application (Moth, 2015). On an average day it is rated that users of the app post 70 million photos and hit the 'heart' button 2.5 billion times. This indicates that consumers are becoming visually orientated. The average Instagram user spends 21 minutes per day, which is a lot for an application that is visually oriented (Moth, 2015). In Lebanon, 1.7 million people are internet users 47% of whom access social media content. 46% of

Lebanese users have active Facebook accounts while 9% have Twitter accounts and the remaining 45% constitute "other" social media including Instagram (Rahme, 2013).

The best place to socially engage with users is Instagram, said Paul Sabria in an interview with Retail Touch Points. The reason why fundamentally, is that humans are very visually orientated and the amount of information you can convey through visual content is increasing, largely due to the rise of smartphones (Fiorletta, 2014, para. 8).

According to TOTEMS (2015) which ranks the most popular brands on Instagram, taking into account the audience of their account (followers) as well as the number of posts on their hash tag (contributors), the top three international active brands are: Nike, Adidas Originals, Starbucks and Roadster Diner (Rd), each having 36,800 followers and counting.

Using the two-step flow model alongside the uses and gratifications theory, this thesis investigates how consumers of Roadster Diner in Lebanon experience the brand through brand activation done on social media platforms, mainly Instagram.

This research will bridge the gap in the scholarly literature by studying and highlighting the association of local brand activation and consumer experience using Instagram, taking Roadster Diner as a case study. Uses and gratification theory alongside the two-step-flow model allows for this research to propose that consumers who follow certain brands and are actively present on Instagram gain a higher sense of belonging with the brand. This also promotes positive association as consumers develop similar values and personality traits as the brand itself leading to a long term liaison, increasing and maintaining company sales. Since the brand will be satisfying the need of consumer on an emotional and physical level, the consumer will not easily switch to another brand that offers similar or same products/services. Thus, this research will contribute to the study of activating brands using a social media tool knowing it is important to

understand and highlight consumer relationship and emotional bonding with the brand in respect to evolving trends and consumer needs.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Connecting Brands and Consumers

Any well established brand should have a strong base founded on defined brand values. Thomson Dawson (2013), a business transformation consultant, elaborated that the most crucial and beneficial move a brand could do is align its values with its consumer's values to achieve loyalty and set a long-term intact relationship. The trick is in aligning the brand values to set an emotional bond that serves as an intangible investment for the consumer and in turn, become irreplaceable. Before patrons allow brands into their credible circle, they need to relate and perceive the brand as a friend who has their best interest at heart to keep the bond and loyalty going.

Roadster Diner (2011) relays their six brand values through their website and Instagram page. The Roadster Diner (Rd) brand values, which are highly visible on their page, are:

*1) Innovation: WE KEEP LOOKING FORWARD*

*To maintain a leading position in a highly competitive market, w encourage creativity and innovations that improve customer satisfaction.*

*2) Transparency: WE COMMUNICATE OPENLY*

*While maintaining company confidentiality, our guests, suppliers and staff can all count on our integrity of transaction.*

*3) Quality: WE ARE ALWAYS AT OUR BEST*

*It is a must that both our service and what we serve are of optimum quality at all times. Customer satisfaction is not to be merely met, it is to be exceeded.*

*4) Human Capital: OUR TEAM IS OUR ASSET*

*Since our human capital is our most valuable asset, we promote diversity, provide equal opportunity, reward fairly talent and performance, value team work, and invest in knowledge.*

*5) Profitability: WE MEET OUR GOALS*

*Achieving profit targets increases company investment power. We keep such targets in view and work hard to reach them to enable prosperity and continue to grow.*

*6) Social responsibility: WE ARE COMMITTED to the social and economic development of our society.*

Dawson (2013) revealed that customers buy for greater reasons than the physical item/object gives off. The key to real customer connection, engagement, and loyalty lies in providing more value to consumers through perception and brand image than the brand gets in cash value from consumers. Meaning that the consumer of Rd will first be attracted to going there for any meal when consistent value of quality is a priority because they know that whatever they pay, it will be worth it with no risk of being dissatisfied; Second, Rd consumers will be pleased and proud to say they ate at Roadsters because they share the same values, hence connecting back to Dawson's (2013) words:

Shared values are the only path to competitive advantage since people aren't lured into enduring relationships because you have a cool logo, make funny ads and offer coupons to convince them to buy your stuff. People (like you and me) want authenticity and trust in our relationships (para. 5,10).

In the same sense, Keven Roberts (2005), CEO worldwide of Saatchi and Saatchi exhibits the role of emotional bonding with the brand to a whole new level by assuring that intimacy \ is a two-way street between consumer and brand. Brand intimacy requires a full

comprehension of what matters to consumers on a deeper level; this also means that brands have to be prepared and willing to expose themselves and reveal their true feelings. It is only through intimacy that the intangible and concrete barriers can be broken and brands can transform into lovemarks. A lovemark is a brand that consumers trust and are loyal to beyond reason. Brands achieve being perceived as lovemarks when forging an emotional connection secured by the use of mystery, fun, sensuality and intimacy (Saatchi & Saacthi, 2015)

Roberts (2005) was approached by marketers with an important question about lovemarks:

You say emotion is the key to building relationships," she said "I'm in the brick industry. How do you make bricks emotional?" "You don't," I told her. "But," I added " what you do is talk about what bricks stand for: homes, families sitting around fire place feeling safe and warm. Achievements. Building built by brick layers whose inspirational dream was nothing less than to touch the sky' (p.148).

In relation to Roadsters Diner, Rd does not just sell good food they sell bonding with friends and families, they sell memories, they sell dependence, they sell good times and that is their lovemark. This lovemark is related to the brand personality. According to business dictionary.com (2015), "Brand personality is defined by human traits or characteristics associated with a specific brand name." According to Niros and Pollalis (2015), brand personality is one of the vital key players for an individual to build a steady and well balanced relationship (Noftle & Shaver, 2006). Just as people connect and click over similar understandings and have alike mentalities based on solid common values, brands also should be characterized by personalities to attract the right consumers (Aaker et al., 2004; Pollalis et al., 2011). From a psychological perspective, "we buy what we are" or in other words,



consumers only buy products/services to feed and build their own identities and nourish their image. Therefore, consumers use brands to reflect the identities they want to portray- the ones that can best reflect who they truly are. For this reason, brand personality covers the functions of both: self-symbolization and self-expression. Yet, on the other hand, a consumer-brand relationship can also be based upon purely functional and not emotional benefits; in this case consumer can have different kinds of relationships with one brand based on their perception of the brand (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2015). The self expression functions of a brand allow consumers to reflect their social status, validate their identity, and display their knowledge of culture, taste and style (Chernev Hamilton, & Gal, 2011). Consumers form greater emotional bonds with brands that align with how consumers perceive themselves, rather than what they aspire to be, thus leading to psychological and emotional fulfillment. Brand personality encourages customers to respond with feelings and emotions toward the brand, using the link that is established with the personality of the brand itself. So, not only is there a two way Identity connection but also this leads to sales, which is the bottom line of every brand intention (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2015).

In an Internet connected society, digital data collection is more valid and valuable, for many industries including the advertising industry. Cookies, which store information through one's web browser when entering any site, are used to identify users through tracing their online tracks of preferences and whereabouts (Beal, 2008). Consequently, based on data intelligence of existing clients, social media is a gateway for brands to learn and understand consumers- where they live and what their interests and behaviors are to pick up evolving trends and ride the right communication wave when needed. In other words, it is monitoring consumer behavior and insights. Also, cookies account for identifying the profile of active or potential buyers who match

the brand personality and who should be targeted (Newman, 2015). Roadster Diner collects consumer data with their full consent through comment cards after every meal at nearly every visit. The way they leverage on collected data enriches their relationship with the consumer on a professional yet personal level. For instance, Rd is very much likely to send a regular consumer a dessert to their office/home on their birthday. Also, when a consumer has had a bad experience and notes it either on the comment card or by telling the waiter, Rd management reacts instantly by compensating the consumer, for instance, with a free meal. All of this shows the consumer that Rd cares and once a consumer starts feeling they are cared for and are important, they too, start treating the brand in the same way, resulting in a two way positive relationship. Hence collecting data about consumers' experiences and/or personal information has no doubt contributed to the success of Roadster Diner's brand loyalty

The data-driven-mindset of companies assists them to sustain and nourish the already existing clients through familiar and personal yet different marketing activities (Sklar, 2015). This relationship marketing allows for intimacy and also cultivates trust and long term associations (Businessdictionary.com, 2015). Bluewolf, a consulting company, reports that "64% of marketers place more value on existing customers than acquiring new ones" (Sklar, 2015, n.d.). This occurs through observing the collected consumer insights to initiate action and further customer engagement and retention (Sklar, 2015). By shaping and balancing the marketing messages, tactics and channels toward the lifecycle and lifestyle of the customer, companies can trigger consumer touch points. Thus, relationship marketing goals of customer satisfaction can be achieved (Novo, 2015). Customer experience helps drive value, reduce cost and build competitive advantage (Beyond Philosophy, 2015).



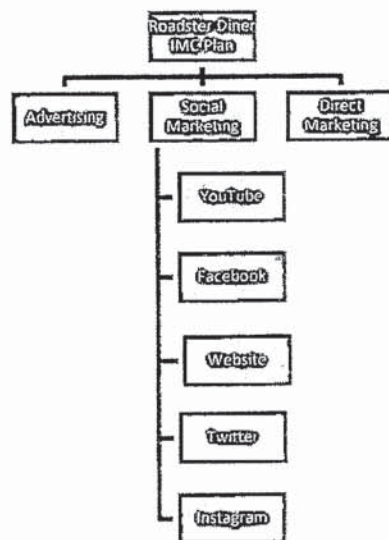
### **Consumer Experience with Social Media Platforms**

Social media interfaces today serve as the thread that weaves and supports the brand and consumers together, permitting users to speak up, defend, or shame the brand based on positive or negative experiences they encounter. Consumers are defined as brand ambassadors, who engage in their own space and time through their mobiles (Gibian, 2013). According to hub spot (2015), 50% of all mobile searches are conducted in hopes of consumers finding local results, and 61% of those searches result in a purchase of product/service.

Companies have to keep up with the current online trend. An example is Disney; Disney's online strategy relies on Facebook as a major metric tool in terms of advertisements and sneak peeks into its latest cartoon adventures. With Facebook's backend collection data providing the activity for Disney's Facebook page it remains as a reliable source. Jorgensen (2012) gathered studies indicating that 80% of social network users prefer to connect with brands through Facebook over any other social media platforms. Nissan for instance has over one million Facebook likes and over 89K followers and over 5K tweets on Twitter. While General Electric has over 900,000 likes on Facebook and over 117K followers on Twitter and over 58K tweets. (Edwards, 2012). IKEA uses Pinterest to show off its ready-to-go furniture since Pinterest promotes the visual aspect of the products. Furthermore, Make-A-Wish foundation took the hash tag #SFbatkid on Twitter when five-year old, Miles Scott who was battling Leukemia, just wanted to feel like a superhero for a day. (Kranz, 2014). This shows that some of the biggest international brands are using social media networks within their Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) plan to reach their audience.

IMC is an approach to achieve the marketing campaign objectives through a well orchestrated synergy of various media used for reinforcing each other (businessdictionary.com).

The American Association of Advertising agencies extends IMC to recognize the value of a complete unified plan that evaluates these strategic roles through a series of communication disciplines to provide consistency, clarity and a maximum impact (2015). IMC contains the promotional mix that covers all or a few of the following tools: advertising, direct marketing, online marketing, sales promotion, PR, and personal selling (Eastlinemarketing.com, 2015). With a focus on social media marketing (online marketing) which refers to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to increase brand awareness and achieve communication objectives, it allows brands to use social media tools to translate media monologues and to interact with their consumers on a personal and "omnipresent" manner (Eastlinemarketing.com, 2015). In the same sense, Roadster Diner uses different promotional methods to reach their objectives while ensuring they are all orchestrated to enforce a consistent message for maximum communication impact. Through thorough observation and study of the market by the researcher, Roadster Diner has the following basic IMC plan with an emphasis on interactive marketing:





Bloomberg released an article predicting that global spending on digital advertising (mobile and social media campaigns) is forecast to match TV spending budgets by 2019 (Gilblom, 2014). "According to Magna Global, at \$163 billion, digital expenditures will reach 30 percent of ad spending in 2015. In four years, it will rise to 38 percent, matching TV's proportion" (Gilblom, 2014). Business Insider also stated that, Ford, for example, defended Facebook when General Motors pulled its \$10 million ad budget before the Facebook IPO, tweeting: "It's all about the execution. Our Facebook ads are effective when strategically combined with engaging content & innovation." (Edwards, 2012 para.10). VISA, in the year of 2008, spent \$2 million on Facebook advertising for a small business promotion (Edwards, 2012).

The use of mobiles and tablets allow consumers to reach brands online with a single touch at any time, consumers are being bombarded and exposed to brand languages (e.g., words that brands choose to use to allow the audience to make a link between that word/phrase and the brand every time they hear the phrase or word; including the tonality that each brand gives off through its wording) and messages from within the brands of same, related and different product/service categories. This reflects that the standard of engagement and language is not being set by a prior offline relationship with that customer but by focusing on competitor benchmarking through virtual customer journey (Baer, 2014).

Conceptually, virtual brand experiences or online journeys resonate from the intangible sensations of feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses that the brand induces through brand stimuli that evoke the consumer through related design and identity packaging, communications and the overall environment. Moreover, brand experience affects consumer satisfaction and

loyalty directly and indirectly through brand personality associations (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009).

Stimulated by sensationalism, social media trends and a generational force that is changing how brands earn loyalty and trust, consumers have become more critical and cynical Llopis (2014). Brands earn trust by being authentic, and by being seen to be authentic,” says Robert Wolcott. “They earn loyalty by creating meaningful experiences across all contacts in ways that matter to customers” (Forbes, para.4-5).

Consumers share their experiences with products via Instagram nowadays. For example, brands can upload images of consumers, with their consent of course, wearing or using their items. User-generated photos give a better idea to potential buyers what to expect and how the product looks in reality while adding context to the respective product. When retailers sell to consumers, one of the key priorities for them is to try and personalize the online shopping experience stated Pau Sabria, co-founder of Olapic (Fiorletta, 2014). Featuring user-generated photos increase the level of purchase by 7%. Users are now responding to image generated content much faster than written text communication; hence visual content is now a key pillar in marketing strategy (Fiorletta, 2014).

### Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks chosen for the study. The two-step-flow model will be used to examine the role of influencers, while the theory of uses and gratifications, on the other hand, will help reveal the gratifications that consumers get through the use Instagram. These two theories were chosen because they go hand in hand. What the two step flow theory does not cover, the uses and gratification theory does in respect to behavior.

The two-step-flow model is a communication theory founded by Paul F. Lazarsfeld after his research on the influence of opinion leaders on the public's decision making during the 1994 presidential election campaign (Sorin Adam Matei, 2010). In the early days of mass communication, people believed that the media had direct power on its audience and it was the only reliable and influential factor holding the power of persuasion amongst people (Postelnicu, 2014). However, during their 1994 experiment, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet found that personal contact, shared information and informal communications were much more powerful than exposure of newspaper and radio as sources of influence on voting behavior (Sorin Adam Matei, 2010). Surprisingly, during the election, most people got their information about the candidates from other people who read about the campaign in the newspapers or heard about the campaign via the radio and not directly from the media. They received their information from their inner social and professional circles: family members, friends, and work colleagues turned out to be better predictors of a person's voting behavior than that person's media exposure (Postelnicu, 2014). Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet also concluded that word-of-mouth transmission of information plays an important role in the communication process and that mass media has a limited influence on most individuals (Postelnicu, 2014). In order words, they discovered that people are more likely to be shaped and influenced by other people, who they



referred to as "opinion leaders" (Lamb, 2014). With this experiment serving as invaluable data at the time, Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld, later published a book called 'Personal Influence' in which they provided further evidence for the two step flow theory of mass communication (Postelnicu, 2014). The term 'personal influence' was originated and referenced to the channeling and intervention of the media's direct message and the audience's reaction and response to that message (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1995). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1995) believed that opinion leaders are very influential in getting people to change their attitudes and behaviors and are quite similar to those they influence.

Opinion leaders pickup information from the media and then pass it over through interpersonal communication to the less-active members or the followers (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). This implies that most people rely on receiving information from opinion leaders rather than directly from any mass medium (Postelnicu, 2014). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1995) believed the two-step flow theory has added to our understanding of the relationship between the mass media, its messages and opinion leaders. They strongly believe that the theory gave way to predict the influence of media messages on audience, helping to forecast any behavior. Overall, this has helped in explaining the success or failure of certain media campaigns (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1995). Based on NextPrinciples.com (2009), opinion leaders are actually brand influencers who are active in their virtual and social sphere. They have built followers with time through engaging about a certain topic or style and are aspired as trendsetters and tastemakers. People listen to what they have to say, where they go, and what products they buy in order to seek the same experiences and journeys as them. Hence, Instagram nourishes these influencers since they are key activities to marketing (Rezvani, 2015). They are the link between the brand and the business objectives the brand wants to achieve. Their online communities are

simply listening to them and if a brand can get these influencers to advocate on their behalf, it will have an enormous amount of impact including saving advertising dollars (Ramaswamy, 2013).

Roadster Diner Instagram page has around 27, 200 followers as opposed to its competition, Crepaway, which has 10,800 followers and who has been in the market much longer. Hence, Rd entered the market with a strong force being consumer and quality centric; thus, perhaps paving its way to being an influential opinion leader and allowing followers to be the same for other consumers. As Jana Majzoubto (2014), the Food Safety Manager of Rd, stated in a press release shared by Al Joumhouria newspaper:

As a local food company, Roadster Diner has one over arching purpose: to provide customers with the highest food safety standards based on internationally recognized principles and practices. Each day, we aim to produce food that people love while producing, marketing and selling them safely and responsibly.

With the support of its loyal fans, the excitement of continuous competitions and activities, and its reliable quality and service standards, Rd is classified as a leader in the market. If not on the food offering level, it is certainly on the service level. Rd initiated the routine of the Manager visiting the table while customers are eating to assure all is well- a trend that several other restaurants followed shortly after.

Going in hand with the Two Step Flow theory is the Uses and Gratification theory to show how consumers satisfy their needs while interacting with a brand through Instagram.

### **Uses and Gratification Theory**

Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch contributed the idea of the Uses and Gratification Theory to research when they initiated the belief that people use the media to their



advantage (Rossi, 2002). This approach brought about a functionalist paradigm where media is used to reach a certain social or psychological satisfaction (Blumler & Katz 1974). In fact, it could be the intention of completing any need according to Maslow's pyramid which encompasses: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs (Lee, 2004). Back in 1970's this theory was labeled as "contemporary" since it contradicted previous beliefs of the audience being passive. The Uses and Gratifications Approach views the audience as active, meaning that they actively seek out specific content through specific media of their choice to achieve fulfillment of certain desires or gratifications that assure and meet their personal needs (Rossi, 2002). The audience consumes media content for the purpose of gratifying their knowledge, entertainment and/or mood management needs. Through social media, users are enhancing their social connections and virtual communities when they interact to feel satisfied. This satisfaction comes from uploading their own produced content for self-expression and self-actualization (Shao, 2009). Guosong Shao also argues that two usability attributes of user generated media are "easy to use" and "let users control" allow people to carry out the mentioned activities effectively and efficiently reaching for an instant derivational fulfillment (2009).

As argued in Aaron Balick's recent book: *The Real Motivation Behind Social Networking*, the easiest explanation of why people use Instagram is to receive recognition. Users have a basic need to try and fit in, to belong to a community that they can be identified with and through sharing visual content on Instagram, they can fulfill their interaction and recognition desires (Storms, 2014).

From a brand perspective, using Instagram promotes the product/service in a much more personal manner than any other social medium would, as Instagram is perceived as the most

prestigious social network amongst the current generation (Storms, 2014). Instagram is a personal communication conduit where companies can participate and visualize the image of their brand, or reflect the brand via its consumers (Wishpond, 2015). Businesses can feature their company through their consumers using their products or services considering customers are a brand's greatest advocates. This would serve as a great way to tell the company's story from the perspective of someone outside the company while embracing a personal relationship with consumers (Wishpond, 2015). Businesses can create their own "window shop" for new products/ services offering allowing consumers to navigate through each gallery easier, giving them a "sneak -peak" of behind the scenes including team bonding dailies, making of products, and capture servicing besides communicating on an intimate level (Wishpond, 2015). The use of Instagram can also cover special promotional offers, informing consumers of any possible visual discount code or other information that is a unique offer for Instagram followers (Glad, 2015). Any upcoming competitions promoted through Instagram will automatically influence engagement activity, specifically through the use of hash tags (Wishpond, 2015).

Roadster Diner has ongoing competitions or draws on its Instagram account (Roadster Diner) to keep the brand itself intact with fulfilling its communication needs with its consumers. Some competitions displayed on its account are: #EatWinRoadster, #Roadster Loyalty, and #RdBurger2USA to name a few. The fact that their communication always motivates and involves consumer interaction, whether through likes, voting, request of uploading pictures and videos etc, permits Instagram to fulfill the need of recognition and brand awareness for Roadster on a personal brand level with its consumers who are active Instagrammers. When pictures of Rd team are displayed it helps the consumers relate to the brand on a personal stance which at some point will trigger previous brand experiences targeting the loyal fan base while bringing new



comers. This reflects the quality among other brand values that Rd upholds. This initiation of brand loyalty is what every brand wants. Also serving for the same purpose of relationship bonding, images of delectable food displayed on Rd's Instagram page motivates consumers to order their cravings. Increase sales is what every brand wants too. In summary of this purpose, Instagram fulfils the brand relationship and brand sales standard needs, adding value to the total brand experience with its consumers.

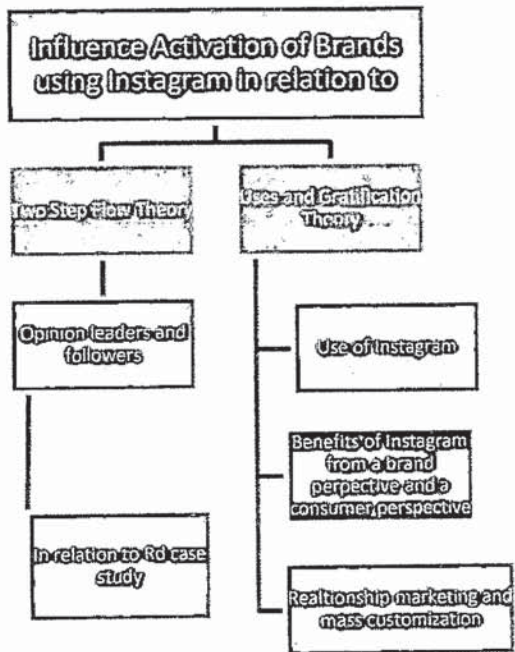
Diverting further, Rd's Instagram account is visually based on images representing customers enjoying their food, having social fun (user generated photos). Most importantly, it has a major synergistic impact throughout its campaigns considering Instagram is the new Facebook for the young generation. The most recent campaign to date (April, 2015) is #Eat WinRoadster where one can order any prime Angus beef along with dessert to enter the draw to win 1 out of 3 MINI Cooper Roadster S. With the support of in store pop ups or complementing placemats, Rd Instagram covers it all through active participation.

When brands leverage on consumer data, they are forming and nourishing, relationship marketing and according to Steve Olenski via Forbes: Relationship marketing "is a strategy designed to foster customer loyalty, interaction and long-term engagement. It is designed to develop strong connections with customers by providing them with information directly suited to their needs and interests and by promoting open communication" (2013, n.d.).

Relationship marketing fosters consumers on a much deeper level by sometimes diverting into mass customization: Production of personalized or customized goods or services to meet consumers' diverse and changing needs at a considerate mass production price (businessdictionary.com, 2015). As Lombardi speaks out to QSR Magazine:

Today, menu customization remains a critical business strategy for competing in the fast-food industry. Increased mass customization is indigenous to our modern culture. It transcends the restaurant industry. Think iPods, cell phones, Dell computers, and cable television channels. Even the Food Network narrowcasts with programming to fit individual tastes and preferences (2015).

According to Jeff Sinelli (2015), customers have become more health orientated and are concerned about the content of the food they eat. As a result, many restaurants have added a calorie count and fat content for certain menu items. Golstein (2015) also believes that consumers have become more knowledgeable about their food and overall this plays into the consumerism of "I want what I want". Golstein views this diet and health opportunity craze as another driver of customization (2015). Recently Rd has added and increased a variety of food items into their "light menu" within each section: main dishes, starters etc. serving as a customization strategy for health watchers while remaining sensitive to the changing trend in food, all the while respecting their fast food menu. Moreover, , Rd has extended their burger line offerings as another mass customization technique catering to all tastes and desired burger styles. Recently they promoted their new 6 Angus beef burgers through the #EatWinRoadster campaign by ordering any Angus beef burger along with dessert to enter in the draw to win 1 out of 3 Mini Cooper cars. This is a direct example of brand activation via Instagram.



### **Hypothesis**

This study examines the rationale and influence of brand activation on Instagram and its contribution to consumer journeys. The two-step-flow theory has been chosen to study the impact of opinion leaders on followers through Instagram. In addition the uses-and-gratification theory is used to examine Instagram and its benefits from a brand and consumer perspective fueling the following research question and hypotheses:

**RQ:** Is Instagram perceived as a prestigious communication tool? If Instagram is perceived as a prestigious communication channel would that drive people to use Instagram to gratify their needs as Rd consumers?

**H1:** Participants who are gratified by Rd Instagram use are more likely (a) to feel a sense of belonging with the brand and (b) have greater consumer experience.

**H2:** Roadster Diner brand activation on Instagram has a positive influence on consumer experience.

**H3:** Roadster Diner as an active leader on its Instagram page positively impacts followers (a) to feel a sense of belonging with the brand and (b) to strengthen consumer experience.



#### Chapter 4: Methodology

To examine the hypotheses, a quantitative survey was administered to teenagers and young adults who maintain active Instagram accounts and who eat at Roadster Diner in Lebanon.

##### Sample

The purposive sample is composed of local Lebanese males and females between 13 to 35 years of age ( $M = 26.349$ ,  $SD = 4.875$ ). A total of 162 participants completed the survey, however only 101 respondents are accounted for in this study due to fit of screening questions (e.g., have an Instagram account, follow Rd's page, are Rd customers) and validity of the response. 41.5% were males while 58.5 % were females.

18.8% of participants visit Rd at least once per week. 77.2 % of participants indicated that they use the social media platform, Instagram, for entertainment purposes, while 37.6% use Instagram to stay updated with social media channels.

##### Procedure

The data was collected by distributing online surveys to the purposive sample. The participants took approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey questions. Participation was purely voluntary and responses were anonymous and confidential and will only be used for academic purposes. Consent was established before the start of the online survey by clicking the "next" button in agreement with the consent statement (see Appendix A for questionnaire). Once they agreed participants were then asked to fill out the questionnaire. The survey included questions to screen for the following things: first whether the reader visits Roadster Diner and second if they are Instagram users and of course if they liked Rd page on Instagram. If they answered no to either one of these questions, then they were directly notified to stop and thanked

for their participation. When participants answered yes, to both questions they were asked to answer all the questions to follow.

### **Variables**

**Prestigious personalized communication.** This variable refers to Instagram, an application used for keeping memories and experiences alive through a world of photos that can be modified using instant professional filters (instagram.com, 2015). Prestige was first measured through a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree and included five items adapted by the researcher such as "Instagram is esteemed" and "Instagram is not impressive.", "Instagram is an important communication channel that helps me connect with different brands" ( $\alpha = 0.726$ ,  $M = 27.592$ ,  $SD = 4.829$ ).

**Brand activation.** This variable refers to bringing the spirit of the brand to life by emotionally connecting with the audience and resulting in potential sales. Also this emotional connection depends on consumer experience. Brand Activation was measured using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. This scale was adapted from Koschate-Fischer and Gusanne (2015) from Brand Trust: Scale Development and Validation and included six items, such as "Seeing posts of Rd display event pictures and winners of contests on their Instagram account makes campaigns and/or promotions more credible," and "I feel closer to Rd when I see posts of staff celebrating with customers" ( $\alpha = 0.734$ ,  $M = 30.936$ ,  $SD = 4.934$ ).

**Sense of belonging.** The Sense of Belonging Instrument (SOBI) is used to measure a person's state of whether they fit in with their surroundings or not. This instrument of measurement was developed by Hagerty and Patusky (1995) through assessing "belonging" in two separate areas: the psychological sense of belonging and the antecedents to sense of belonging, people's motivation (desire and ability) for sense of belonging. Hence adapting the



same instrumental methods as Hagerty and Patusky's, sense of belonging for Roadster Diner customers was also measured using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree which includes nine affirmative and three negative statements such as: "I feel I fit in at Roadster Diner", "I generally feel that I am accepted at Rd" and "I don't feel like I belong at Rd" ( $\alpha = 0.734$ ,  $M = 30.936$ ,  $SD = 4.934$ ). All negative statements were recoded.

**Consumer experience.** Consumers are bound to be led on a journey, whether good, bad or indifferent, providing an opportunity for emotional engagement (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994). Consumer experience was measured using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. The eight items were developed by the researcher and include questions such as: "The first place that pops up in my head when thinking of good quality food is Rd", "My experience with Rd is positively consistent", and "At Rd, the staff are always friendly" ( $\alpha = 0.827$ ,  $M = 44.585$ ,  $SD = 5.876$ ).

**Uses and Gratifications.** Uses and gratifications refers to the type of media people use to satisfy their needs. This variable was measured using a Likert-type scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. The five statements of composite items were adapted from Thuy-Vy Bui (2014) and include "I go on Rd Instagram page because I enjoy it," "I follow Rd Instagram page to stay updated about events, prizes and/or offers" and "I follow Rd Instagram page because I feel I belong to the Rd group" ( $\alpha = 0.805$ ,  $M = 16.33$ ,  $SD = 3.527$ ).

**Influencing Power.** This variable refers to a system in which a person influences opinions and acts as a leader in a given situation (e.g., Roadster - Influencer - Consumer). Influencing power was measured using a Likert-type scale to gauge how much people are likely to be influenced and take decisions based on Rd Instagram posts. Seven items, inspired from Mattison (2011) were used to make up the composite scale. These items included "Seeing my



favorite Rd dish uploaded makes me crave for it" and "Seeing a post on Instagram of a menu item might help me choose what to eat at Rd ( $\alpha = 0.803$ ,  $M = 30.79$ ,  $SD = 5.760$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

The data was assessed for outliers. There were 61 such cases that did not fit the requirement and/or did not complete the survey. The research question was divided into two parts. The first of which looked for whether participants perceived Instagram as prestigious and for that reason descriptive analysis (mean scores) was used. The second part of the RQ distinguished if a relationship is associated between perception and uses and gratifications, thus linear regression was used. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were assessed using linear regression in order to find out the associations between the independent and dependent variables.

## Chapter 5: Results

### Research Question: Perception of Instagram (Appendix B, chart 0.0)

The research question was broken up into two components. The first part questioned if Instagram was perceived as a prestigious communication tool. The average score for all participants was 4.60 out of 6.00, indicating that the vast majority agree that Instagram is prestigious. The second part of the question was posed to understand whether their perception would drive uses in order to be gratified. Linear regression analysis indicated that participants who perceived Instagram as prestigious will also be driven to use Instagram to gratify their brand needs ( $\beta = .530$ ,  $SE = .104$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r = .471$ ), where prestige accounts for 22.2% of the total variance.

### Hypothesis 1: Uses and Gratifications (Appendix B, chart 1.0 + 1.1)

H1a was supported. This hypothesis tested whether participants who are gratified by Rd Instagram use are more likely to feel a sense of belonging with the brand. Linear regression analysis indicated that people who are gratified by Instagram use gain a high sense of belonging with Roadster Diner ( $\beta = 0.329$ ,  $SE = 0.064$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = 0.473$ ). Uses and gratifications accounts for 22.4% of the total variance in sense of belonging (SOB).

H1b was also supported. This hypothesis tested the relationship between uses and gratifications and consumer experience. Linear regression assessment indicated uses and gratifications accounts for 29.1% of consumer experience, such that people who are gratified by Instagram use are more likely to have positive consumer experience ( $\beta = 0.294$ ,  $SE = 0.071$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = 0.397$ ).

**Hypothesis 2: Brand Activation and Consumer Experience** (Appendix B, chart 2.0)

H2 was supported. Hypothesis 2 was posed to understand the type of association with Instagram brand activation and consumer experience. Linear regression indicated that Rd brand activation on Instagram has a positive influence on consumer experience accounting for 35.1% of the variance ( $\beta = 0.449$ ,  $SE = 0.81$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = 0.539$ ).

**Hypothesis 3: Two-Step Flow** (Appendix B, Chart 3.0 +3.1)

**H3a: Sense of Belonging.** H3a was supported. This hypothesis tested the relationship between Rd being a leader and its outcome of belongingness and relation towards the brand consumers have as being "followers". Linear regression implied that there is a positive correlation between the two variables ( $\beta = 0.441$ ,  $SE = 0.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = 0.592$ ). Rd being a leader accounts for 35.1% of the variance.

**H3b: Consumer Experience.** H3b was supported. Linear regression indicated that there was a positive relationship between Roadster Diner being an active online leader on its Instagram page and empowering consumer journeys with a 28.9 % variance. ( $\beta = 0.426$ ,  $SE = 0.70$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = 0.537$ ).

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

Upon collecting the above results, below is further insight to what these results mean in relation to consumer and branding insights and the online affect of brand activation on a humane consumer journey through Instagram. This discussion is of prime value since it highlights the humane emotional bonding with the brand in respect to evolving and changing trends through a virtual world. Also it directs the F&B (Food and Beverage) fields in what messages to send and what social media tool to magnify and stress on throughout the synergic effect of using all the social media tools. And last but not least it fulfills the gap of the existing literature and can be of use for future scholars to build upon.

### **Prestige**

#### **Summary of Results**

Results indicated that majority of users do perceive Instagram as a prestigious tool and because of this perception, they use it to gratify their various needs such as entertainment, shopping, and information.

#### **Interpretation of Results**

Prestige of Instagram was measured based on the perception that Instagram is esteemed, has a reputation, and is a distinguished communication tool that helps people connect with different brands.

Therefore the results are in agreement and support Storms (2014) statement: Instagram is perceived as the most prestigious social network amongst the current generation. Along with Dawson's (2013) view where he posits that the key to real customer connection, engagement, and loyalty lies in providing more value to consumers through perception and brand image than the brand gets in cash value from consumers. Hence because being present on Instagram is perceived



as "prestigious", this positively affects consumer engagement. Instagram is an entire feed of visual stimulation encouraging interaction at its highest levels, hence Instagram promoted visual marketing and that is a breakthrough in itself. It created a visual need and fulfilled it to fit the busy lives of people. Rd uses Instagram as an artistic outlet as well and a form of expression for its consumers. With this prestigious perception, consumers form a positive brand attitude and that matters because it is valuable. For example, consumers who agree that Instagram is reputable and is a distinguished social media tool might rely on this media tool for their everyday use and purposes. Likewise, when they associate their usage to an esteemed social media tool this perhaps first indicates their need for prestigious media outlets and second that consumers might be matching their characteristics to the social media they gravitate towards. To the group of participants Instagram was seen as an important communication channel that helps them connect with different brands. This in itself signifies how significant social media tools can be in advancing brands, especially if the audience/consumer recognizes and understands the potential; indirectly perhaps leading brands to execute communication to that set standard. Also, it is more important for brands to know, acknowledge and understand the perception that their consumers have towards certain communication tools. This insight will direct and confirm their decision of using and investing in the right media to reflect positively on the brand.

### **Uses and Gratifications**

#### **Summary of Results**

*Sense of Belonging:* Participants that are gratified by following Rd Instagram page for any of their personal purposes (perhaps entertainment, informative, or involvement) feel they belong at Rd. This was indicated through the outcome when Rd Instagram supporters felt like they belonged with Roadster Diner since Rd is virtually where they are (on Instagram). This



makes them confident toward Rd, feeling valued and cared for. Thus, users are being gratified through Rd Instagram page and there is a high positive sense of association with belongingness.

*Consumer Experience:* With regards to being gratified through the use of Instagram, results also show that Rd followers seek a positive and a much greater consumer experience through believing that Rd understands the way they like their food, the friendliness that the staff always displays, along with their prime consistency in quality food.

### **Interpretation of Results**

*Sense of Belonging and Consumer Experience.* Participants who are gratified by Rd Instagram are more likely to feel a sense of belonging with the brand through feeling confident, valued and cared for. This contributed positively to an overall greater consumer experience. Rd users embark on a positive consumer journey when they already feel the brand is empathetic and corresponds with them. This seconds and is in alignment with Forbes “They earn loyalty by creating meaningful experiences across all contacts in ways that matter to customers” (2014, p. 1). Earning loyalty makes Rd more credible and that is a big deal. New consumers will start following Rd because of that. They want to keep good ties. The biggest advantage here is that using Instagram satisfies the consumer on a personal level when all is going good, meaning brand experience affects customer satisfaction and leads to loyalty.

Participants agree with the idea that Rd activity on Instagram increases the credibility of the different campaigns and/or promotion initiatives. Credibility is a key factor for any brand to maintain and reflect because it is the link of trust between the brand and their consumers, it reflects reliability, transparency and most importantly confidence. For this reason, brands invest a lot in advertising. Not only to send a certain message but to maintain credibility by delivering what they promise through every competition, advertisement and or promotion. Not only do

consumers acknowledge the credibility but they feel closer to the brand thinking that the brand cares each time that Rd engages people in activities. Consumers are desire to be up-to-date with various competitions and events taking place because they want to be part of the experience. Their experiences, as noted through the results, have been more positive than negative which helps engrave a positive welcoming attitude for Rd and its media usage (that of which is far from overload or bombardment). This breeds a sense of belonging with the brand, because it allows consumers to feel that they fit in at Rd and start to value not only the experience but the brand, thus engaging more and recognizing the importance of Rd online/offline community involvement. This sense of belonging then nurtures the idea of loyalty.

This brand loyalty is a human characteristic that is of vital essence for any brand to stand the test of time. It is the primary purpose of communicating to consumers nowadays, not just to sell the service/product but also to maintain a positive lasting relationship. In relation to the uses and gratification theory, using Instagram is important for the need to fit in and be recognized, this is supported and gained by consumers belonging to communities of pages/accounts where all the people have common interests and similar goals. With the support shown through likes, comments and reposts on Instagram, these needs are being met. Thus, participants are gratified on different levels and their usage remains an act of enjoyment and involvement.

## **Brand Activation**

### **Summary of Results**

The results indicate that Rd's Instagram involvement has allowed Rd to reach its core values through strengthening the consumer experiment by promoting innovation, quality, profitability and a greater sense of belongingness through its human capital, transparency and

social responsibility initiatives as seen through the various posts and interaction with the Instagram participants.

Consumer experience is strengthened and carried through Instagram. A sense of belongingness likewise increases because customers enjoy Rd at the physical locations and on the SM network as well - accompanying them everywhere they go.

### **Interpretation of Results**

Roadster's online activation on Instagram presence contributes to its relationship with its consumers making communication to and fro much more visible. Also, this puts Rd and its users on the same level of understanding and transparency with each other. Having insight to the internal human side, like celebrating the customer's birthday with a cake on the house and the like, results in a positive direction for consumer journey. Brands achieve being perceived as "lovetemarks" when forging an emotional connection secured by the use of mystery, fun, sensuality and intimacy (Saatchi & Saatchi, 2015) which Rd offers and is strengthened via Instagram. Also by being transparent and showing who Rd is behind the scenes through fun, crazy, and emotional moments on Instagram, keeps the consumers feeling authentic. This results in nurturing a sense of trust not just creating it. Trust is what every relationship needs as a solid foundation.

Having a positive brand experience through the right brand activation ends up with the consumer fully understanding the brand message and for this reason, activating a brand in the right manner, with the right messages and with relative timing is of vital measures to keep on nurturing this trust that was previously formed. It is all about putting effort to keep the brand alive, relevant and wanted.



## Two-Step Flow

### Summary of Results.

*Sense of Belonging* The results confirm that Roadster Diner being an active leader on Instagram account, positively impacts its followers, impacting what to crave for. In addition seeing common family and friends commenting and eating at Rd encourages consumers to be more active as well.

**Consumer Experience.** The results also signify that Roadster Diner who is an active Instagram leader strengthens the consumer journey. This was measured through a series of degrees where consumers post pictures of Rd platters to make their friends crave for what they have, also where Rd posts platters that help consumers choose what to order. This communication with the brand positively contributes to a well-rounded online consumer journey.

### Interpretation of Results.

#### *Sense of Belonging and Consumer Experience.*

Roadster Diner being a leader sets the bar for its followers; therefore there is a positive correlation between Rd being an influencer and a consumer cultivating a sense of belonging. Rd influences its users through their Rd Instagram posts (either emotionally or by action). This enhances the consumer relationship with Rd that shows that they understand consumers' needs and wants. Thus, Rd can be a very influential leader through its postings on Instagram which have the possibility of sparking cravings, which in turn can lead the consumer to order or in other words buy the product. Therefore, in summary, it is important for brands to have a strong presence and encourage others to be active as leaders because as seen from the results, participants do respond to "leaders" or guides. They are influenced by the posts especially if that

posts comes from the brand or a person they trust. Thus, offline relationship dynamics transferred to online systems.

Roadster Diner being a leader on its Instagram page strengthens a two way communication between brand and consumer, increasing its positive online experience of initiatives ranging from ideas of what to eat to celebrating together. This seconds Gibian (2013) who posits that social media interfaces today serve as the thread that weaves and supports the brand and consumers together, permitting users to speak up, defend, or shame the brand based on positive or negative experiences they encounter. Consumers are defined as brand ambassadors and advocates. If a Rd consumer had a good experience he/she will express that through a picture or comment on social media; they will tag friends and so on. At this point, this consumer is defending the goodness of the brand acting as a brand ambassador.

Also, in alignment with the tested theory and based on NextPrinciples.com, opinion leaders are actually brand influencers who are active in their virtual and social sphere (2009). Hence, Instagram nourishes these influencers since they are key activities to marketing (Rezvani, 2015). Making connections with the influencers is just as important as being an influencer and that is something general marketing does not express. Rd being an influencer itself also has other consumers as influences, making these consumers brand ambassadors with attitudes. This attitude is reflected on the brand and passed on to people they influence.

After gaining trust with a consumer then nurturing this trust, these consumers become brand ambassadors and in the real world, these brand ambassadors who are the spokesmen/woman of the brand, who defend and support the brand and who advertise for the brand are much more credible in the eyes of consumers than advertisements since people are more likely to believe a personal testimony with a brand over an advertisement message. This

makes brand ambassadors much more crucial and saves the brand a lot of advertising dollars when they optimize and highlight these brand ambassadors to spread their communication messages.



## **Chapter 7: Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to the study. In the methodology, the sample and the response rate was a major concern as not all participates were Rd Instagram followers despite being Rd consumers. Another limitation is that Instagram was not directly compared to other social media networks to highlight the comparison of Instagram toward any other social medium in terms of attention and time; which in future studies can be added in order to track trends and usage. Also, with regards to the methodology, not all variables tested had a pre-tested scale of which the researcher could adapt for greater reliability scores. Some had to be created, however when assessed for reliability scores turned out to be more than sufficient. Another limitation of this study may be due to personal or social subjectively resulting in different responses than the ones revealed in this study, yet one has to assume that participants were honest in their responses since none of the questions were sensitive type questions that could have led to socially desirable answers.

Also, uses and gratification has its limitations in whether the use of Instagram is only one contributing part of the gratification compared to the total consumer's gratification of all social media tools yet still since our focus is on Instagram; it is very relatively selected. Also the use of Instagram itself which is the main focus is visually orientated leaving no room for sharing constructive articles. However this does not prevent the study from contributing to the existing knowledge of branding and consumer insight.

### **Suggestions**

From the gathered information and despite all the limitations, this study contributes to the F&B (Food and Beverage) fields that are keeping up with online trends to stay relevant. This research shows that the choice of social media instrument that is chosen along with being

visually oriented, omnipresent, transparent and positively interactive with consumers can lead to enhancement of consumer journey, belongingness and brand loyalty, which all are key ingredients in what it takes to stay relevant nowadays.

Roadster Diner can use this study as contribution to further its marketing strategies.

This study measures the intangible effect of the present brand activation on Rd Instagram page in measurement of what they are doing now and their impact. It also holds a direction and indication for enhancements through consumer's perspective of relatable issues (i.e.: consumer journey vs. brand activation). These results also contribute to insights that can help further and broaden ideas in their advertising campaigns or future endeavours by giving back to society since now they understand how and what to communicate, education awareness of sending the right messages and of course based on the perception of social media tool studied (Instagram) Rd can now really consider it as serious channel during communication. Also with positive results and cultivation of Rd loyalty as the results indicate, Rd can expand in the direction of Corporate Social Responsibility to further add to their brand essence and expand beyond just targeting their Rd eaters.

### **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

This study focuses on virtual consumer journeys with brands. It highlights the brand activation via Instagram taking Roadster Diner Lebanon as a case study to discover the relationship between brand and consumer. That is why using the two-step flow to contribute to the power of influencers have over followers and with the insight of the uses and gratification theory elaborating the satisfaction and fulfillment of using Instagram and following Roadster Diner. This research was designed to test and gain further insight into consumer behavior and bonding between a brand and its virtual followers through a fairly new application. This study tested the human emotional bonding the consumers gain with a brand through a very virtual world. Consumers nowadays are looking for the intangible attributes that the brand can offer and they now link the brand personality and character to their own. With this in mind brands need to add value to consumers through brand image. In this social virtual world of Instagram, there are followers and opinion leaders. These followers want the same experiences as their influencers experience, they aspire to be like them, and this is where the brand benefits from the two step flow theory. Brands work on turning these trend setters, influencers and opinion leaders into brand anchors and ambassadors being a spokesman/woman for the brand. This makes the brand messages much more credible and humane. As for the uses and gratification theory, nowadays people actively seek out the content they want via the medium that suits them best, and the need they fulfill using Instagram is the need to fit in and be recognized through expressions of support (likes, shares, comments etc.).

These results will be useful in advertising, marketing and public relations fields and especially useful in the microscopic realm of relationship marketing . It will assist in understanding the brand's communication channels and messages to bond with its audience in a



positive way. With the same adaptation of internal structure and approach, the F&B fields can adopt the successful methods to nurture consumer relationships with transparency, trust and consistency. Brand attitude should always meet up to the expectancy of the brand consumer because that is how they relate on a one-on-one level, and that is also one positive result of brand activation playing out right. In specific, Roadster Diner using Instagram has positively affected the image of Roadster staying relevant since users of Instagram perceive this tool as "prestigious". This perception relates to Rd followers in a sense that it drives them to use Instagram to satisfy their needs as a consumer. And benefits any brand that uses or wants to consider using Instagram to really understand the perception of its users and how they perceive this medium tool. After all the brand has to follow the communication trend of tools that their consumers spend most time on and give the most attention too.

Also, participants who are gratified by Rd Instagram, feel they fit in since after all the character and brand personality is visibly transparent online. All of this contributes and positively affects consumer-brand relationship, building trust and therefore making way for trust between the brand and its consumers and when this trust is nurtured the right way, these consumers are then turned into brand ambassadors.

Roadster Diner brand activation on Instagram actually does have a positive influence on consumer experience, a longtime of consistent satisfaction leads the brand, in this case, Roadster Diner, into a "lovemark" this emotional bond is extreme brand loyalty and the ultimate goal of every brand.

In addition, Roadster Diner as an active leader on its Instagram page positively impacts followers making them feel they fit in with the brand, this of course is shown through transparency of influencing posts and captions strengthening consumer relationships and

increasing consumer-brand bonds results in a fully satisfied consumer journey and encourages consumers to positively represent Roadster Diner, making them Rd brand ambassadors.

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**Appendix A: Questionnaire**

## Roadster and Instagram

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the questionnaire. Your participation is voluntary. Your responses will remain confidential and you will be anonymous at all times, meaning that your answers cannot be matched up to your name or any other identification. The information provided will be used to complete a MA thesis and possibly being published in an academic journal. Please answer the questions as best as you can in relation to your own opinion, attitude, and behavior. This questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. Clicking the button below indicates that you have read the above statement and that you are willingly volunteering to complete the following questionnaire.

1- I have an Instagram account

- Yes
- No

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To I follow Roadster Diner's Instagram page. If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

2- I follow Roadster Diner's Instagram page.

- Yes
- No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey. If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To I am a Roadster Diner customer.

3- I am a Roadster Diner customer.

- Yes
- No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey. If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To How frequently do you visit Road...



Approximately, how frequently do you visit Roadster (RD)?

- Once per week
- Two-three times per week
- Four or more times per week
- Once per month
- Two-three times per month
- Four or more times per month
- Once every 6 months
- Other, specify

Do you think eating at RD reflects your social status?

- Yes
- No

Kindly move (slide) the red tab from 1-6 in relation to how much you think Roadster Diner reflects your prominent status. 0 = you don't agree; 1 is the lowest level of agreement and 6 is the highest level of agreement. Rank...

\_\_\_\_\_ how much does RD reflect your prominent status

I use Instagram for one or all of the following reason (s). Please select all that apply.

- informative
- entertainment
- to stay updated with the popular social media platforms
- to participate in contests/promotions to win
- to follow news on brands
- to know which brands to shop
- to follow and see what my friends are doing
- other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been an Instagram user for?

- less than a month
- few months
- 1-2 years
- 3 or more years

Which social media platforms do you have an active account on? Select all that apply.

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Others (please specify all) \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours per day do you spend on social media networks?

- 0 hours
- Less than 30 minutes
- 30-59 minutes
- 1-2 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 5-6 hours
- 7 or more hours

Out of all the total hours you spend on social media networks, how many hours do you spend on Instagram each day?

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30-59 minutes
- 1-2 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 5-6 hours
- 7 or more hours

How many times do you interact with Roadster's(RD) Instagram page, either by commenting, liking or uploading content?

- daily
- once a week
- 2-3 times a week
- once a month
- 2-3 times a month
- more than 4 times a month

Kindly answer the following questions as best as you can about your opinion regarding Instagram, where 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
Instagram has a high reputation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Instagram is a distinguished social media tool.</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Instagram is esteemed.</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram is not impressive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Instagram is a prestigious communication tool.</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram is an important communication channel that helps me connect with different brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Kindly answer the following questions as best as you can about your opinion regarding Roadster Diner (RD), where 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.













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Kindly answer the following questions as best as you can, where 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
Seeing my favorite RD dish uploaded makes me crave for it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeing a post on Instagram of a menu item might help me choose what to eat at RD.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeing my friends actively respond to RD's Instagram page motivates me to stay connected and communicate with the brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I post on RD page in order for others to crave the menu item I had.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am positively influenced by the RD Instagram posts (either emotionally or by action).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RD always fulfills my craving and meets my satisfaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I usually like pictures on RD Instagram page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Kindly specify your gender

- Male
- Female

Please specify your date of birth (mm/dd/year).

Thank you!





Appendix B

Chart 0.0

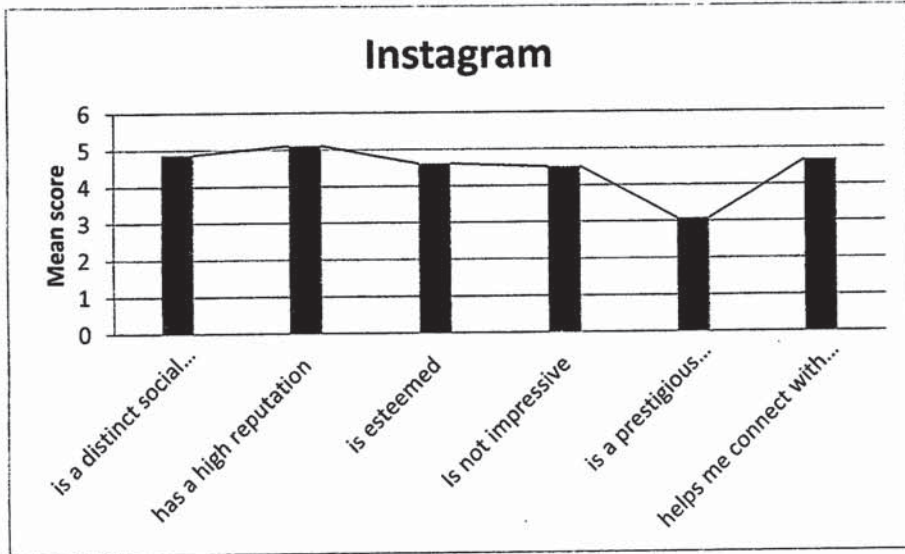
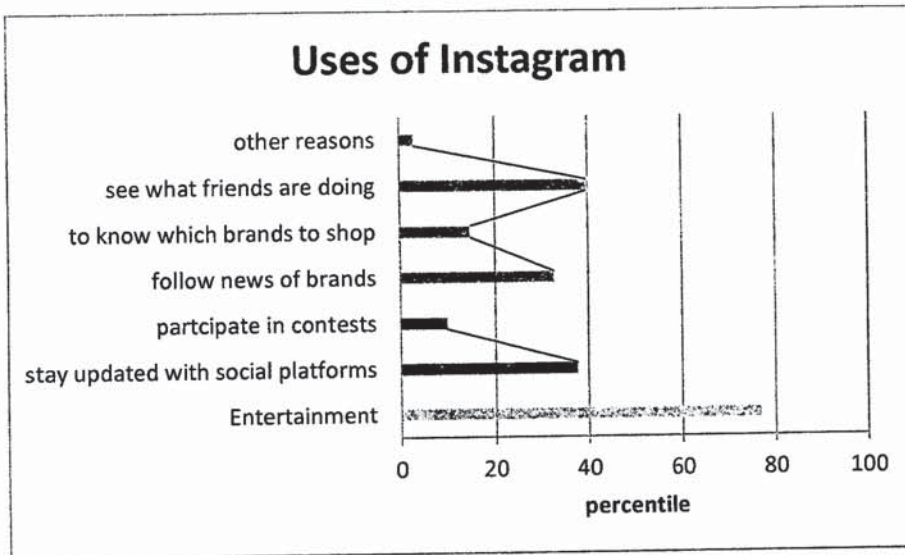


Chart 1.0 + 1.1:

1.0



1.1

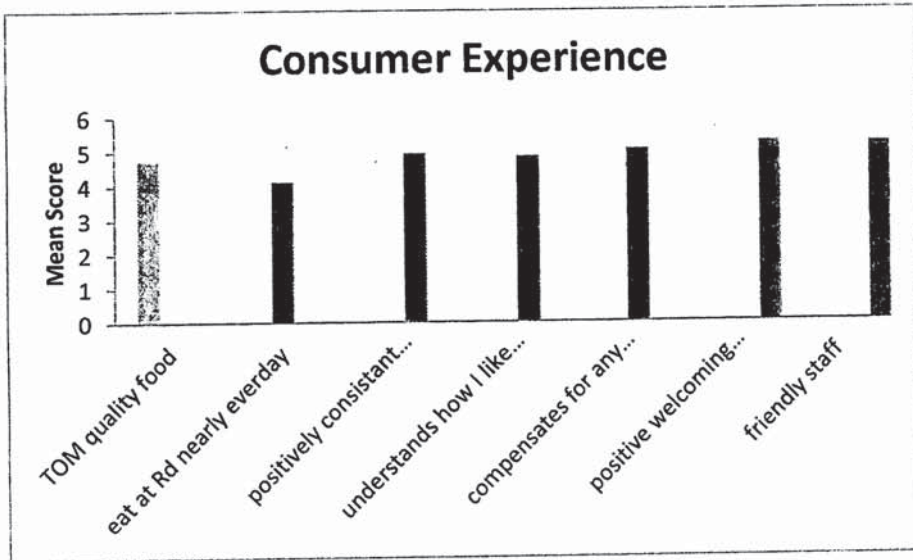


Chart 2.0

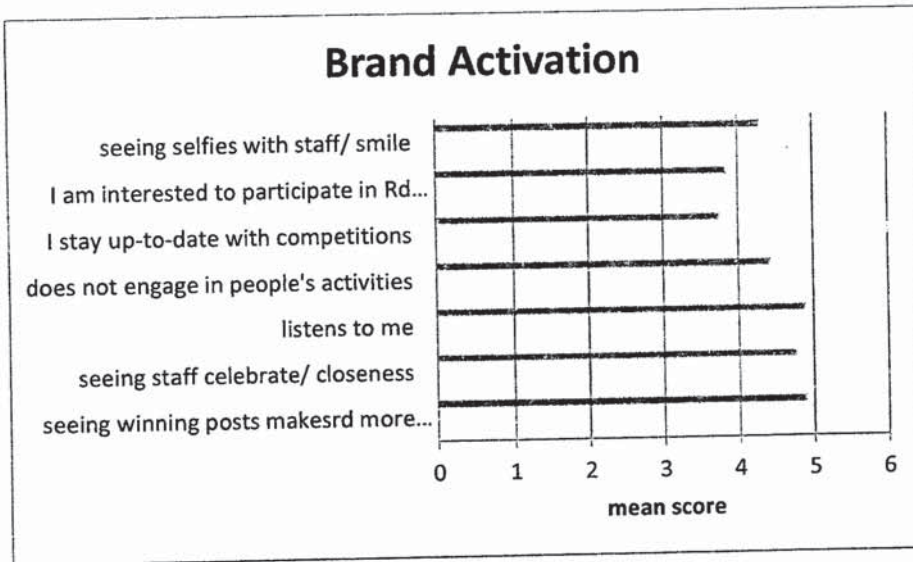
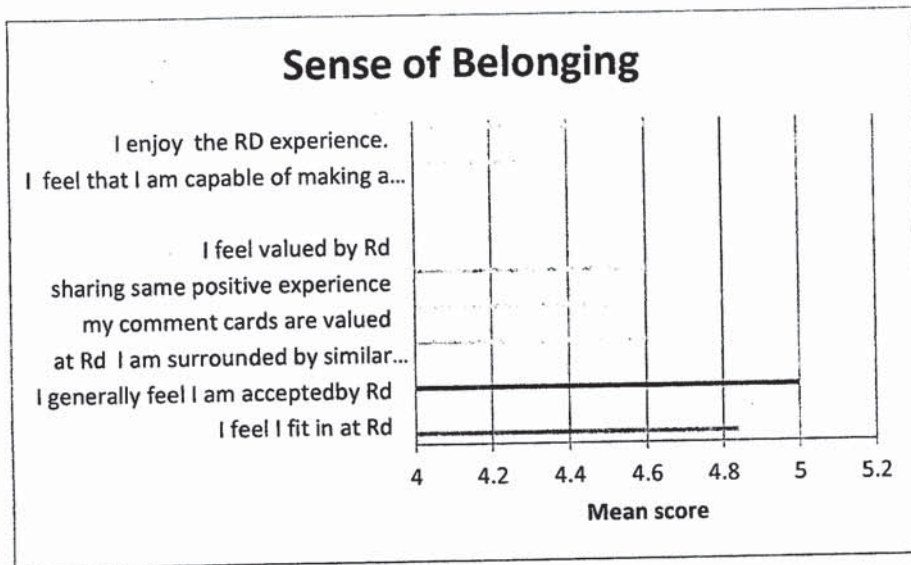


Chart 3.0+ 3.1

3.0



3.1

