



Department of Media Studies

# Twitter: a new marketing tool for retail business in Lebanon

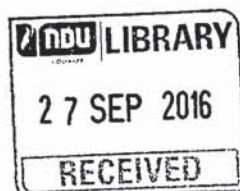
A Thesis  
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by

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Spring, 2014



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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to create an understanding of the importance of using Twitter in Lebanese retail companies and how it directly affects the customers' buying decision. The aim is to define the characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of Twitter that differentiate it from traditional marketing communication channels (TV, Press Ads, Billboards...), and from other Social Media tools (Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram....) It is also about opportunities and challenges Twitter induces for communication. The paper explores the use of Twitter in communicating with current and potential customers. The focus is on Retail companies in Lebanon. The study is accomplished by using the qualitative research methods. The thesis looks at two case studies of two top Lebanese retailers. The assessment is conducted through the focus group and interview research techniques. The reason behind this study is to make a holistic representation of the role of Twitter in customer communication. The focus of the theoretical part is on the changes that Social Media and especially Twitter generate for conventional marketing communication through the diffusion of innovation theory along with the development communication theory. The data is gathered through in-depth interviews with representatives of Lebanese companies operating in Retail markets and experts in Social Media.

Additionally, two focus groups were conducted with a sample of loyal customers of the two retailers under study. Hence, this will shed light on the use of Twitter among Lebanese retailers. To increase the engagement with customers, companies need to use this platform. Twitter creates opportunities and challenges that vary in the different phases of the relationship development. At the first phase, the main objective is to create awareness of the company and its products. Twitter allows marketers to reach a wider audience and potential

customers. At the negotiation phase, it is important to start to expand the relationship where communication and targeting markets are more efficient in Social Media.

At that moment, Twitter boosts the engagement with customer to communication and permits more informal and nonstop communication. Companies operating in the retail markets in Lebanon and abroad should assess whether Twitter generates any added value to their customer communication or not.

## BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The organic evolution of Media has always been about augmenting people's options in communication. We can tailor our communication by increasing preciseness according to our needs but the more alternatives we have, the more we are required to consider what the best option is. (Levinson 2006, 125 – 126.)

Overall Social Media have increased its popularity as a communication medium between people. The purpose of sellers and customers has changed since the creation of Mixed Media and digital communication channels. Customers are no longer passive receivers of marketing communication like old time (press ads and TV ads...) but they became part of creating the content and the information of every marketing campaign. Thus customers have become more active. Companies in Lebanon are now more concentrated on Social Media communication tools rather than traditional Media (Ex: TV Press Ads...). The main rule of Social Media is to talk with client not to them. The seller needs to engage the consumers to communication either by providing good content or creating good surroundings or they will not visit the digital forums of the seller. Alternatively, the seller can self participate in external digital surround. (Weber 2007, 4, 13 – 14). It is important to recognize that the customer or user of Social Media controls the conversation.(Ryan & Jones 2009, 238).

Finally, to communicate efficiently with their customers, retailers in Lebanon are using Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and Twitter.



## **OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this study is to show the importance of using Twitter in Lebanese retail companies, and present the positive and negative effects if no proper follow up on the page is made on a regular basis. The outcome of this research study is to provide companies with a good and clear view of how Twitter can be used to build and enhance their brand equity “the commercial value that derives from consumer perception of the brand name of a particular product or service, rather than from the product or service itself” (David A., 1991) into customers’ mind.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to have a full overview of the functions of Twitter and its importance as one of the major Social Media tools, we will be answering the below questions

- Why using Social Media is so important nowadays?
- What are the benefits of Social Media and Twitter in particular?
- How retail companies can benefit from Twitter if used properly?
- What are the challenges that retail companies face while using Twitter?
- What key performance indicators can a retail company use while measuring the impact of marketing and branding activities through Twitter?

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 Definition of Social Media and Twitter

Social Media is a mean of communication among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 60) Social Media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

As for Twitter, it is a free online Social networking platform or service that enables its users to send and read text messages of up to 140 characters, these messages are known as "tweets". Every user has a page with all their tweets compiled on it among other things such as tweets directed at that particular user. With that, Twitter aims to build a bridge to fill the gaps between different cultures and groups. However, what sets Twitter apart from a standard email is that it allows someone to broadcast rather than message. It is public and anyone can comment on anything. This truly unique structure enables someone to talk to a celebrity, a political figure, or a company among many other entities. (<https://business.Twitter.com/Twitter-basics>).

In March 2006, Jack Dorsey created Twitter and it was launched to the public in July of the same year. This platform gained a worldwide reputation and today it has over 500 million registered members (Tech Crunch, July 2012) generating more than 340 million tweets per day and managing more than 1.6 billion search queries per day (Twitter Research Team, 2011). Twitter became now one of the most visited websites.

What is encouraging is that unregistered users can read the tweets, while registered users can react to the tweets by re-tweeting and posting new tweets. Twitter is now based in San Francisco USA, and has additional offices and servers in New York, San Antonio and Boston.

Furthermore, Twitter introduced as well mobile applications for iPhone, iPad, Android, Windows phone, BlackBerry and Nokia and this way people can access it more easily.

From September through October 2010, the company started to work on a "New Twitter" platform, a completely renovated edition of Twitter.com. It included the capability to see pictures and videos without leaving Twitter itself by clicking on personal tweets which have links to images and clips from several supported websites including Youtube and Flickr. In November 2010, Twitter launched to the public the "New Twitter experience". (P. Dean, 2011).

Nowadays, teenagers are moving from Facebook to Twitter. A European study showed that teenagers shifted from Facebook to Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and Snapchat (Kiss, 27 December, 2013). They usually do not care if other Social Media options are less sophisticated, all they want to do is to move from Facebook since now all parents are part of this Social Media tool and then teens feel uncomfortable having their parents on their accounts (Miller, 2013)

## **1.2 Jargon of Twitter**

While communicating on Twitter, users can group posts together by topic or type by use of hash tags words or expressions prefixed with "#" sign. Also, the "@" sign followed by a username is used to mention or reply to other users. (Strachan, Donald February 19, 2009).

To repost a text message from another Twitter user, and share it with one's own followers, the re-tweet function is symbolized by "RT" in the text message.

Micro blogging is as well used on Twitter since it is a broadcast tool that works like a blogging but what is a blog? A blog is a conversation or informational site available on the World Wide Web and consisting of distinct posts usually displayed in reverse order from the most recent post till the oldest one. Until 2009, blogs were usually the work of a single individual, occasionally of a small group, and often covered a single subject. (Blood, September 7, 2000).

What differentiates a micro blog from a blog is that micro blogging is smaller in its content in both actual and aggregated file size. Micro blogs "allow users to exchange small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links". (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2011). These small messages are sometimes called micro posts.

### **1.3 Twitter as a Marketing Tool**

Twitter is the group of people that discuss everything online from politics, food, fashion, nightlife to technology. It is a way for people to connect with their interests and as well to discover useful information on any subject they like. It is a real-time chat about what matters to each of us; brands and businesses included. (Twitter For Business, 2013)

For businesses, Twitter is a precious Social Media marketing tool. In order to successfully use Twitter in a Social Media marketing campaign, the user should post more than one-off advertisement and coupon codes. More than 340 million tweets are sent from Twitter every day (Twitter Research Team, 2011), that is why hard work is necessary to make the business successful. Companies should always stay aware and check the page to be able to gather data about individuals who regularly tweet about the business's subjects. Also, if the posts contain

popular keywords, people will also be able to easily find the company hence interact with it, and the company can pay close attention to the wants and needs and frequently post useful information. After all, the most important part of Social Media marketing is to be Social. Re-tweeting is important for a successful Social Media marketing campaign. Tweets that are extremely appropriate and appealing have a chance to be spread and re-spread by other Twitter users, which permit a tweet to reach a countless number of subjects and possibly become viral. Multimedia posts, for instance links to videos, photos, fun articles, news or blogs have more chance of being re-tweeted.

Tweet-ups are in-person assembly of Twitter users. The users have a chance to strengthen present relationships or they can make new ones and socialize. Later on, the members will post follow-up tweets that contain precious information related to any industry. Tweet-ups give the business an identity as if it is a person with a face and a name and it closes the gaps between both virtual and physical worlds. To conclude, when used to its full advantage, Twitter may create a far-reaching, healthy Social Media marketing plan. (Online PR News, 2010)

In its short history, Twitter became an important marketing tool for celebrities, politicians and businesses, by showing a level of intimacy that was never revealed before on any Social Media tool. It gives the public the capability to speak directly and easily to the celebrity or to the institutions. In many cases, it is not the celebrity or the institutions who are answering but a "Ghost Twitterer". (Twitter For Business, 2013)

For instance, Barack Obama's in his 2012 presidential campaign used Twitter, Facebook and Youtube to reach American voters.

Adidas, the multinational brand and a worldwide leader in the sporting supplies industry, integrated an offline and online marketing campaign focused on two hashtags, #takethestage and #stagetakeno. Adidas used these hashtags in all print, outdoor and television activities to

drive fans to the Twitter account and thus spark conversations with engaged UK fans during Olympic Games. @adidasUK also shared rich media content in Tweets including behind-the-scenes photographs of athletes like David Beckham photo booth.

@adidasUK drove an average engagement rate of 30.8% with their promoted trend #stagetaken. By providing a fresh stream of exclusive, brand-relevant content, the #stagetaken promoted trend drove six times the average daily mentions of @adidasUK. The promoted trend generated over 17 million impressions and @adidasUK tripled their daily followers' rate on the trend day. (Twitter business, 2013)

One major tool that could be used on Twitter is Podcasts. It is a digital Media document (audio or video) that could be downloaded via Internet (Marketing News Staff 2009). Podcasts can be synchronized with any portable multimedia device, example iPad, MP3 player or iPod. For marketers podcasting is an easy way to communicate with targeted customers. It is simple and quick to use. (Shim, Shropshire, Park, Harris & Campbell 2007.) Podcast is a great tool to introduce new products to the market or to give more information to customers about how to use a product.

#### 1.3.1 Using Twitter as a marketing tool can strengthen the brand: (Tabitha, 2012.)

- The big number of users: Twitter has reached around 230 million and those users send an average of 500 million Tweets every day. (Twitter for Business, 2013)
- Twitter is free of charge and free for registration: there are paid tools that build easy ways to manage your account like advertising on Twitter. It is one of the least expensive ways to develop a business and increase the number of followers. Companies should know their followers, who to follow and how to tweet
- Twitter satisfies people's desire of delving into other people's lives

- Companies can be followed easily by clicking on the button follow: any person that has a Twitter account can follow a company of his choice so he receives all the tweets
- People can search, link and follow
- Twitter allows users to post text updates via SMS, instant messaging, email, photos and even video links
- Twitter helps to gain new customers
- Twitter establishes the brand online
- It keeps the customer informed: by sending tweets all day long and useful information for customers or potential ones. Twitter is the best way to use because it does not bother and the customer could check the information posted at his convenience
- It can provide customer service: people on Twitter can put their complaints or questions
- It is viral, the content can easily become viral once the posts are re-tweeted and when people create hash tag symbols about the business
- Twitter is mobile friendly. With the massive reach of the mobile phone and the innovative monthly sales of smart phones the Twitter platform marries flawlessly with the mobile platform
- It provides businesses with a simple way to combine branding customer service and sales with one stroke. What would have been managed in a separate and disjointed manner can now be handled on a Twitter account by any of the employees at the same time. Knowing that it is free, businesses are reducing their costs and increasing sales by using Twitter.

Such growth can bring some bad attention along with the good ones.



### 1.3.2 Disadvantages that companies may face (Tabitha N. 2012)

- Being an open Social Media platform, Twitter is subject to spammers that flood the timeline with spam messages and sales link
- 140 limit character limit for tweets is a big challenge since users need to be extremely brief and creative with copywriting skills while still getting the message across to clients
- The viral nature can work against the company if people do not like something the firm did. So the communication has to be very fast to avoid any damage keeping in mind that customers do not forget and do not let pass any mistake without making a big point of it
- Twitter posts can not be edited. All posts on Twitter should be removed in case of a spelling mistake or a typing mistake because users do not have the privilege to edit.

### 1.4 Influence of Twitter on Buying Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the method they use to choose, secure, and organize products, services, practices, or ideas to satisfy needs. (S. Kuester, 2012).

Therefore, companies attempt to expand their products and services and to price them properly and promote them to right customers, to please their customers' needs. And it is obvious that communicating with customers plays a major role in the market vis-à-vis the current competition (Kumar, 2010). Trait theorists believe that individual differentiation could influence a customer purchasing behaviour (Bosnjak, 2007). That is why; marketers should understand customers before positioning and communicating with them.

In the buying process, consumers can feel the individual belongings of the product with their sensory organs. A customer's observation of the value of a company's product might

vary based on subjective reasons, some could be associated with the product itself, and others linked to the individual's situation towards the product (Cross & Dixit, 2005).

That is why understanding the customer buying behaviour is keen to any marketer.

Marketers need to understand the following:

- Why consumers make these specific purchases?
- What are the factors that influence the customer buying behaviour?

The consumer buying behaviour is influenced by several factors cultural, Social, personal or psychological. These factors are the reason why customers develop product or brand preferences. Even though many of these factors cannot be directly manipulated by marketers, they should understand its impact on the customer to be able to develop marketing mix strategies.

The marketing mix is a set of activities, or tactics, that any company could use to promote its brand or product in the market. It is based on the 4Ps and we mean by that Price, Product, Promotion and Place. However, nowadays, the marketing mix includes much more Ps such as Packaging, Positioning, People and even Politics could be vital mix elements.

While buying any product, a consumer goes through 5 stages before making his final decision and buys:

1. Problem recognition
2. Information search
3. Evaluation of alternatives
4. Purchase decision

## 5. Post purchase behaviour

The length of this decision process varies from consumer to another. Consumer may not take the decision of his purchase alone; he might be influenced by several people playing different roles. The more the decision is important the more people are involved in the buying decision behaviour.

As mentioned in the previous section, the consumer's behaviour is also influenced by cultural, Social, personal and psychological factors. Marketers must understand and study these characteristics to develop a suitable marketing mix.

**CULTURAL factors** consist of consumer's culture, subculture and Social class. These factors are often built in our principles and the decision processes that will be adopted.

**SOCIAL factors** include groups such as families, friends, colleagues... This level clarifies the fact of external influences of others on customer purchase behaviour either directly or indirectly.

**PERSONAL factors** include the age range or lifecycle stage, job, financial situation, way of life, personality and self concept. These may explain why customer preferences change.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL factors** include motivation (Maslow's hierarchy of needs), perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes. (Kotler, 1994).

(Constantinides and Fountain, 2008) presented the Stimuli and Response model that was founded by Kotler's in 1994 and they suggested that the original model has changed due to the usage of Social Media. They also deemed that consumers are not only influenced by traditional marketing but also by the uncontrollable personal influencer.

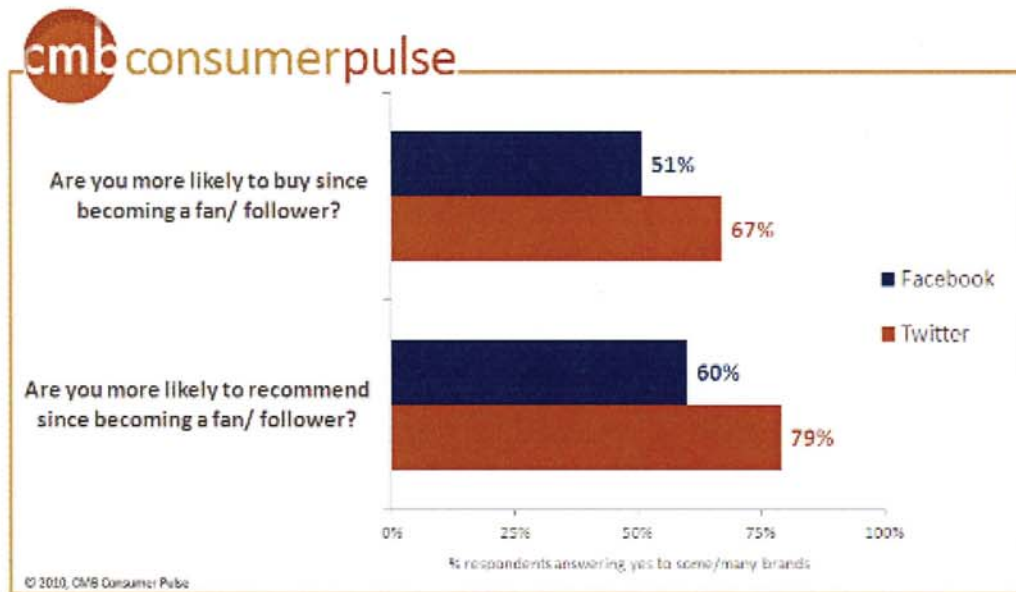
Therefore, even before the Internet, word of mouth was an important technique used while promoting any product. With the popularity of Social Media networks like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest; every person's word of mouth could reach hundreds or thousands of followers a day. That is why, it is important for any business to use these tools to interact directly with their most loyal customers and the potential ones, thus to be exposed to an unlimited network of individuals and associate it with products they may not have previously seen.

Another important change the Internet and Smartphone's presented to the business world was the ability for consumers to search for product reviews at home or while visiting the store. Businesses cannot stop the negative comments or posts that people are giving. In the same context, a study conducted by Chadwick Martin Bailey showed that 51% of online shoppers consider Social Media a credible source of information while searching for a product; that is why marketers should be very careful when promoting their products directly on Social Media networks and when interacting with potential customers..

As per a survey conducted by the same researcher Chadwick Martin Bailey, 51% of the respondents were motivated to buy from a company after liking its page and 67% motivated to buy from a company after following it on Twitter. (Brant Cruz and Josh Mendelssohn, 2010)

Graph 1: Social Media as a motivating factor in the buying process

The graph below shows clearly that fans and followers are more likely to buy when they are linked to Facebook or Twitter. (Brant Cruz and Josh Mendelssohn, 2010)



That is why marketers should consider always adding a budget for Social Media.

### 1.5 Characteristics, challenges and opportunities that can be created through Twitter

Marketing communication in Social Media, and Twitter in specific, includes the customers in the communication process. This study sums up the characteristics of Twitter and the opportunities and challenges that are generated for communication to be able to build a clear understanding of its role in marketing

Originally marketers used to utilize Social Media to communicate with existing customers and to create awareness of their brands among people so they can reach new clients.

With time, Social Media use has become a peer-to-peer communication tool where customers could create its content library by using the applications and services. (Hearn, 2009) Companies interact through communities which are used for communication and transactions. Social Media enable rapid interaction between the marketer and customers which helps to collect information and conduct market research fast. In addition to that in customer-to-customer communication, the fast interaction that occurs makes easier the peer suggestions in decision-making. (Dahan & Hauser, 2002). The success in marketing through Social Media requires that the marketer has a precious content to deliver. It is not enough just to be present but the marketer should engage the audience in its posts and online discussions and also has to be ready to listen and to talk. Interaction is the key element, and marketers should not own the conversation because, as stated earlier, Social Media marketing strategies differ from the ones adopted in the traditional Media.

While trying to reach new customers, Twitter builds new opportunities to reach a larger amount of potential customers with no cost at all. There are also big challenges that Twitter creates for companies. The people's privacy is at risk. Confidentiality and securing the information provided can end up in wrong hands so a major challenge resides as well in legislation and copywriting.

An important aspect of Twitter is updating information. Stability should always be maintained between the user-generated and the marketer-generated content (Weber 2007, 38).

The opportunities created via Twitter as well are enormous. Transparency in communication will build customer trust. Twitter and all Social Media as well enable the company to reach not only the customer itself but other companies as well.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theory consists of fundamentals which answer the following questions: what, how and why.

What: describes the factors leading to a certain phenomenon.

How: deals with the relationships between the factors.

Why: explains the selection of factors.

The academic research about Twitter in the Lebanese retail business context is fairly scarce.

The aim of this study is to explore the role of Twitter in order to highlight the opportunities that this platform offers and, at the same time, the challenges it creates. Social Media in general and Twitter in particular have changed the way people communicate with each other.

Unlike traditional communication, Social Media does not require a specific time and place for companies to keep in touch with their clients and vice versa. All Social Media applications are designed nowadays for more of an ad hoc communication - with new modes of interaction. (Shih 2009, 45 – 46.) -

The use of Twitter in customer communication in the Lebanese retail business - enables efficient and nonstop communication that helps to preserve and extend relationships with customers. Customers can become co-creators of the content on Twitter and they voluntarily participate in the communication that is occurring. As co-producers of content, they help the organization gather information when needed and ideas for product development. Therefore, transparency and trust between companies and clients is enhanced.

The communication on Twitter becomes more casual and continuous.

The main characteristics of Twitter are the following transparency, openness, interactive communication, community, participation and user-generated. These characteristics were also found in the theoretical part (Singh et al. 2008; Solomon & Schrum 2007, 24; Tapscott & Williams, 2008).

Targeting markets is easier because users are divided according to their interests and preferences. Reaching a wider audience and targeting markets more effectively increase brand awareness. (Weber, 2007).

Twitter is challenging since you communicate online with people that you have never met - offline. Accordingly, the credibility of the information given online cannot be evaluated based on the offline relationships criteria.

Understanding the possibilities and the extension of Twitter is the biggest challenge to the sellers since followers can openly write their comments online and the marketer cannot prevent that.

There are also technical aspects which include privacy and trust issues as well as the measurement of the effectiveness of Twitter. Engagement is as well important from both sides' customers and company (Creese, 2007).



Accordingly, this part explains two theories that are appropriate to answer the hypotheses of this study, the first is “The Diffusion of Innovation Theory” and the second is “the development communication theory”.

## 2.1 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Everett Rogers, a professor of rural sociology published his book: "Diffusion of Innovations" in 1962. In order to found this theory, Rogers researched over 508 diffusion studies and created a theory that would be relevant to the adoption of innovations between both individuals and organizations.

Four main factors characterize this theory: innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system.

Innovation “*is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption*” (Rogers, 1983).

Communication channel is "the means by which messages get from one individual to another". (Rogers, 1983).

Time "*The innovation-decision period is the length of time required to pass through the innovation-decision process*" (Rogers 1983, p. 21), "*Rate of adoption is the relative speed with which an innovation is adopted by members of a Social system*" (Rogers, 1983. p. 21, 23).

Social system “*is defined as a set of interrelated units that are engaged to accomplish a common goal*” (Rogers, 1983)

These characteristics work in combination with each other. The diffusion is a way by which an innovation is communicated through known canal over time between the members of a certain social system.

Rogers explains as well that this process is essential to the Diffusion of Innovation theory. People practice 5 stages while accepting a new innovation: information, influence, choice, implementation, and confirmation. Once the innovation is accepted, it should be extended through several communication channels.

To relate this theory to the study, it will help to gain a deeper understanding how the selected companies were pioneers in using Social Media for marketing purposes, to what extent they exposed or still expose their brand/service online or to what degree they interact with their customers via Twitter, and finally how all this may affect their performance, productivity or the company itself.

## 2.2 Development Communication Theory

The term "development communication" was created by Nora Cruz Quebral.

Quebral defines Development communication as:

*"...the art and science of human communication linked to a society's planned transformation from a state of poverty to one dynamic socio-economic growth that makes for greater equality and the larger unfolding of individual potentials."* (Quebral, 23 November 2001).

"Development Communication" refers to either a type of marketing and public opinion research, or on another hand to the use of communication to facilitate a community social development. (Quebral, 1972). It promotes information exchange to bring about positive social change, connect stakeholders, creates conducive environment and as well judge risks and opportunities. (Mefalopulos, 2008).

The development communication system includes information, education, social marketing and mobilization, promotion, and at last community participation. It has been labeled the fifth theory of press. (Flor, 1995). In this thesis an investigation will be made concerning whether or not the two retail industries chosen ABC and TSC have distinguished any advantages in using Twitter to create awareness. Two focus groups will be conducted.

Furthermore, this second theory will help out to know if Twitter is a helpful asset to these companies to spread awareness about their products and services. The interviews will give us a wider idea whether Twitter is effective to be used as an essential marketing tool or it should always be supported with other Social Media platforms.

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The methodology of the study has implications to the research process as well as to the interpretation of the results.

In this thesis, we will be adopting two case studies of two major retail companies in Lebanon. The first one is ABC S.A.L. (One of the popular fashion retail companies in Lebanon since 1936). Today, ABC has six branches - including two big stores that combine world-class shopping, dining and entertainment. This dynamic retailer is continuously reinventing itself to create a best shopping and leisure experience. (<https://www.abc.com.lb>) The second company is the Sultan Center (TSC) which opened its doors in July 2008. They have around 8 stores (<https://www.facebook.com/TSCLebanon/info>).

Qualitative research method is used in this thesis to reflect on these two cases.

Qualitative research is the ability to gather a deep understanding of human behavior and why this behavior was originally done. (Denzin K. & Lincoln S. 2005). This type of research gives the opportunities to examine the why and how of any behavior done, not just what, where and when.

From a conservative point of view, these techniques produce information valid for particular cases only.

In this paper, interviews and focus groups were used to collect data from appropriate respondents. (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2005, 123).

All the interviews were recorded. The interviewees were chosen based on their expertise in the field and on their positions in the companies under study.

In depth-interviews provide insights on the possibilities that Twitter offers for communication.

Accordingly, 6 interviewees were selected based on their expertise in the advertising industry in Lebanon and experience with Social Media tools or their position in the selected companies. The interviews were conducted in March 2014. Interviewees were selected from different sectors as stated before in order to compare and contrast the views and actions of a wide selection of practitioners.

From ABC: Ms. Roula Aboud - Event and Social Media manager in ABC since 2005.

From TSC: Ms. Christine Khoury - Marketing Manager at TSC since 2007

From Carat Media agency: Ms. Jennifer Wartabedian - Senior Digital Executive since October 2012.

From INDEVCO group: Ms. Rania Rached - Senior Marketing and Advertising specialist since October 2012.

From Optimedia: Mr. Fadi Khalil - Media planner and analyst.

From Add Bloom: Cynthia Dagher - Social Media Strategist at AddBloom since March 2012.

This method of semi-informal question and answer is meant to create the impression of a conversation and gives the interviewee the flexibility to extend on certain topics and broach on other issues. In order to minimize the errors, e-mails were sent to the subjects before interviews were done. The language used was Arabic, which helps decrease misunderstanding in interviews.

This thesis also looks at 2 focus groups with the customers of both retailers (ABC and TSC sultan) in order to check the effectiveness of the marketing campaigns conducted by these companies. Focus groups were held on March 21<sup>st</sup> and April 9, 2014.

This research was conducted according to ethical standards like privacy, secrecy and accuracy.

The interviewees were informed previously about the objectives and purposes of the thesis. They agreed to participate in the study. Privacy of the interviewees was respected, that is why we did not provide any names. Direct citations are used to provide better understanding of the studied phenomenon.

## 4. HYPOTHESES

H.1: When used to its full advantage, Twitter is a vital tool in a full-fledged Media marketing plan.

H.2: Twitter is a highly beneficial tool for marketing, but it still needs to be used in conjunction with other Social Media platforms, such as Flickr, Facebook and Youtube.

### 4.1 Empirical Findings

This part presents the data of the five interviews conducted with Social Media and marketing experts and the two focus groups with the clients of the retail companies under study.

#### 4.1.1 In depth interviews

The speakers were chosen based on their expertise and know how. Their insights lead to realistic findings on the research topic.

**They were asked the following questions:**

- Do you usually rely on Social Media in your marketing mix? If yes which platforms do you usually use?
- How long have you been on Twitter to promote your brands?
- Do you consider Twitter as important as other Social Media tools?
- In your opinion, can Twitter replace other traditional Media such as Radio/ TV/ Billboards or it is a complimentary tool.
- Based on your experience, what are the pros and cons of Twitter in retail?

- What is the budget spent on Social Media in general and Twitter in particular yearly? Why?
- Who manage your Twitter account? Why?
- Is there any specific campaign that was run through Twitter?
- How do you see the future of Twitter in the retail business in Lebanon?

#### **4.1.2 Focus Groups**

The questions of the focus groups stressed mainly on the efficiency of the campaigns run on Twitter

##### **Questions for ABC and TSC customers**

- When did you join Twitter?
- How often do you log on to your Twitter account?
- Do you usually rely on Twitter to get information?
- Do you follow any retail company on Twitter?
- Do you trust the information posted on Twitter by the companies you are following?
- Do you think Twitter is efficient for a retail company?
- Can you recall any retail campaign run on Twitter?
- Since you are an (ABC or TSC) client do you follow them on Twitter?
- Do you trust the information they post on Twitter?
- Do you remember any campaign that was run by ABC /TSC on Twitter?



List of interviewees and their biographies

**March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014: interview with Christine Khoury.**

Khoury has a bachelor degree in advertising and marketing from Saint Joseph University. She worked in the retail business since 2002. After her success in the marketing department at Spinneys, she moved to TSC in 2009 to become TSC Lebanon marketing manager in charge of the following departments: public relations and communication, research, customer relations and loyalty program. Under the public relations and communication department, she handles the digital and Social Media platforms of TSC Lebanon.

**March 27, 2014: interview with Roula Aboud.**

Aboud started working for ABC as a marketing coordinator since 2003. She holds a bachelor degree in Public Relation/Image Management and a second degree in advertising and marketing. She is currently the Events, Digital Media & PR Manager at ABCs.a.l. She was in charge of launching the digital media strategy in ABC from the website to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.... Now, ABC Facebook page has approximately 172,000 likes as for Twitter they reached 5,180 followers.

**May 30, 2014: interview with Jennifer Wartabedian.**

Wartabedian started serving in Carat Digital Media agency since 2012. She has a BA degree in Marketing from the American University of Beirut (AUB). She is managing several clients like Adidas (Levant Market), Nokia (Levant and Iraq Markets), Pegasus Airlines, Total Liban, Heineken, Japan Tobacco Inc (JTI), Solen (Ozmo & Biscolata), Jammal Trust Bank, Reebok, DeLonghi Air Purifier. To provide more details, Carat is a leading global Media agency; they are present in 140 countries with over 6,500 people worldwide.

**June 12, 2014: interview with Rania Rached**

Rached is a senior marketing and advertising specialist at INDEVCO group since October 2012. She has a BA degree in advertising and marketing from NDU.

INDEVCO is an international industrial group that produces paper, plastic, paramedical, pharmaceutical, chemical and petrochemical products...

They have over 9400 employees' worldwide working in 71 companies, and nearly 60 years of experience.

**June 12, 2014: interview with Fady Khalil**

Khalil is a media planner at Optimedia, handling many clients such as BLF with an experience of over 5 years in media and digital planning. He holds a BA degree in business marketing from NDU and has been working in the marketing field since 2009.

As for Optimedia, it is an international media agency that deals with online and offline advertising. They work on a rigorous and objective approach to help their clients improve the effectiveness of the marketing budget spent

**June 16, 2014: interview with Cynthia Dagher**

Dagher is a Social Media Strategist at AddBloom since March 2012. She had been working in the online media field for 4 years now. She used to be an art director at Ray White.

AddBloom SAL is a Full Service Digital Creative and Marketing Agency servicing a portfolio of brands across the MENA region and North America like Swatch, Maybelline, Kipling, Atamian, and BMW ...(www.addbloom.com)

When conducting the interviews, the questions that were addressed to the experts in the field were designed in a way to collect practical information to better analyze the topic and come-up with solid conclusions.

**The case- studies:**

The Sultan Center made a major Lebanese acquisition in July 2008 by operating under different retail chains to cater to all customer needs. Eight TSC Plus centers have opened in Achrafieh, Verdun, Jnah, Zouk, Zouk Michael, Baabda, Hamra, CityMall Dora (<http://www.sultan-center.com/>).

ABC was established back in 1936. It was the first retailer in the country to hire women and the first to advertise. With six branches including two flagship stores that combine world-class shopping, dining and entertainment, this dynamic retailer is perpetually reinventing itself to create the ultimate leisure experience. Their mission is to always be the customer's first choice for quality, variety, service, value and convenience. ([www.abc.com.lb](http://www.abc.com.lb)).

## The Interviews

### Social Media in the Marketing Mix

As per Ms. Khoury, TSC is using Social Media a lot since it is cost efficient and it can reach diverse target audiences at the same time. As for ABC, Ms. Aboud said that ABC relies heavily on Social Media because it attracts modern customers.

Regarding the platforms used by both companies, Facebook is the number one platform because it creates buzz and interactivity with customers followed by Twitter which is so viral and influential and Instagram which is a little bit more selective and depending on the visual impact. On another note, Ms. Wartabedian informed us that her customers are there and so are other competitors. Platforms depend on the company, the product itself, and the audience. Usually, it is a choice of all or any of the following: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest. Ms. Rached was specific while answering this question since they have 2 kinds of business at INDEVCO: the business to business and business to customers. She said “we use Twitter, LinkedIn & Facebook for the BUSINESS TO BUSINESS markets and Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Twitter for the business to customers markets.

Mr. Khalil informed us that they always advise their clients to use Social Media knowing the expansion of the digital universe. These tools started to grab more and more audience on a global and local level. He added that, 3 out of 4 people use social networks regularly. Each platform used is essential, from Twitter to YouTube; Facebook to Instagram. They all give a wider selection in terms of activities that can be done. (World Bureau of Advertising Q4 Report, 2013). Ms. Dagher as a Social Media specialist believes that using Social Media is essential for any company since people are moving very fast to this new technology.

### **Use of Twitter**

Khoury stated that TSC Lebanon started using Twitter a year ago although in other countries TSC Twitter page was launched way before but here in Lebanon they had a budget problem regarding this issue. In contrary, ABC started using Twitter since 2011 only for retail brands to promote ABC lifestyle such as new openings, new collection, events, promotions etc. As for Wartabedian and Khalil, clients started aggressively using Social Media platforms 2 years ago. Ms. Rached said that they have been using Twitter for 4 years now. Ms. Dagher on another hand said that they received the first client in 2011.

### **Importance of Twitter**

Khoury thinks that people in Lebanon are not used yet to Twitter they are more accustomed to Facebook. That is why TSC Lebanon is facing problems in increasing the number of followers comparing to other TSC Twitter pages in other countries.

Same for Aboud, she considers that without any doubt, Facebook is on top of all other channels due to many factors: pool of database, interactivity, live feeds etc... always on the move with new features and becoming more and more close to daily lives. Indeed, Twitter is less interactive, however so influential and message can just spread in seconds. Based on ABC history, both channels complete each other. However ABC team is less attentive when using Twitter which can turn to be so negative and have harmful effects on the brand in few seconds. Wartabedian and Dagher accept as true that Twitter is important but again it depends on the product, company and so on. Moreover, there is an untapped audience on Twitter that cannot be found on other Social Media platforms. Mr. Khalil shared same opinion with other

interviewees, he added that based on his experience all brands should start now using Twitter before the medium become cluttered and loses its effectiveness.

In contrary, Rached considers that Twitter is not really important in Lebanon.

### **Twitter versus traditional media outlets such as Radio/ TV/ Billboards**

For the time being, Khoury is convinced that Twitter is only a complementary tool; people need more time to use this new platform. But About perceives things differently: for her what is really wise about Social Media is that each tool has its very specific features, which come to complete the normal media tools and then offer a 360 degree approach for the campaign rather than to replace regular media.

The retail companies' representatives believe that Social Media is more modern and up-to-date with new customers' lifestyles and it hits the youngsters' minds. For Wartabedian and Rached, Twitter will not replace other traditional media however it is a harmonizing tool and she insisted that this depends on the brand / the audience / the budget ... Khalil is convinced that Twitter might in the future replace Radio (radio is a call for action same as twitter) but billboards will remain important visually and awareness wise. Twitter has the capability to support all media and to be a standing media by itself. It can be used as a complimentary tool or a main one depending on the type of activity planned (contest on Facebook vs. updates on Twitter). The most effective way to use Twitter is an extended arm for customer service, product or service feedback, industry networking, promotions or contests, news or company updates. For Dagher, Twitter will replace in the near future the traditional media and especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region but in Lebanon the growth is slow. She added that, in the Arab countries Twitter is booming since they do not like to reveal their pictures and profiles for cultural reasons and norms.

**Pros and Cons of Twitter in retail**

At this stage, Khoury, Aboud, Wartabedian and Rached share the same vision: they think that Twitter is influential, viral, and quick. It is instant, low cost, simple, friendly and accessible for all profiles and ages. It allows to network efficiently and with large groups of people. Besides, it helps to gather valuable feedback and become closer to customers. So it is kind of building permanent relationships instead of just hard selling. Twitter is addictive it has an individual focus. It is impossible to control what people are saying, rumors can spread easily and customers always expect an answer in one minute. Finally, filtering the spam followers request a lot of time and resources. Khalil and Dagher deem that Twitter is very efficient as a personal networking application so it is an ideal consumer used application. Twitter is an announcement medium vs. other social networking tools that can accommodate other ways of advertisement. Twitter is evolving and sharing via twitter expanded to cover pictures, videos.

**Budget spent on Social Media in general and Twitter in particular**

As per Ms. Khoury, TSC spends approximately 20% of its total budget on Social Media. They do not have a specific budget for Twitter and even they did not launch their advertising section. ABC overall yearly digital budget is 200k, out of which 5k are usually dedicated to Twitter. Wartabedian, Dagher and Khalil refused to disclose such information since it is very confidential. Rached informed us that the biggest budget spent in both business to business and business to customers is on Facebook. They never allocate a budget for Twitter since they are not really convinced till present of its effectiveness.

**Managing Twitter accounts**

For the time being, TSC and ABC accounts are managed by Digital agencies under the supervision of Khoury and Aboud teams because it requires extra resources and specific expertise in the community management, which both companies do not have for the moment. INDEVCO accounts are managed by the online marketing department of the group. Wartabedian, Dagher and Khalil have a team that manages their clients' accounts.

**Campaigns that were run via Twitter**

Regarding TSC, nothing was made especially for Twitter but they always link their Facebook campaigns to Twitter especially that till now the number of followers is not very high. ABC worked on campaigns in the past years, contests such as the egg hunt etc... They turned to be less appealing than Facebook and Instagram. As for INDEVCO: Twitter is a tool to announce their events but not for specific campaigns.

**Future of Twitter in the retail business in Lebanon**

Khoury believes that Twitter will grow and will be a very important tool because the young generation is switching from Facebook to it. She was quite sure that all retail business will in these coming years move entirely to Twitter based on the experience of their group in other countries. A big example of supermarkets could be the British Waitrose, they use Twitter as a major tool to advertise. However Aboud believes that there are millions tweeting this very moment and the phenomenon is not going to end anytime soon.



She can see Twitter in the future digital era, however more into individuals such as politicians, stars etc... rather than for corporations unless they include major changes in the overall platform.

Ms. Aboud concluded by saying that it depends on how you want to use Twitter. Like any other means of communication, Twitter has its own advantages and disadvantages. Advantages far outweigh disadvantages. Hence, retailers must ensure that Twitter is used sparingly. Ms. Wartabedian said that clients are now more adopting Twitter as they are becoming aware of the power of Social Media along with its measurable key performance indicators. Ms. Rached said that there is no impact on the retail business especially in Lebanon. Other social media especially Instagram have more value & return on investment (ROI) than twitter. She asserts as well that Twitter could serve to enhance brand awareness but not in Lebanon especially in the time being.

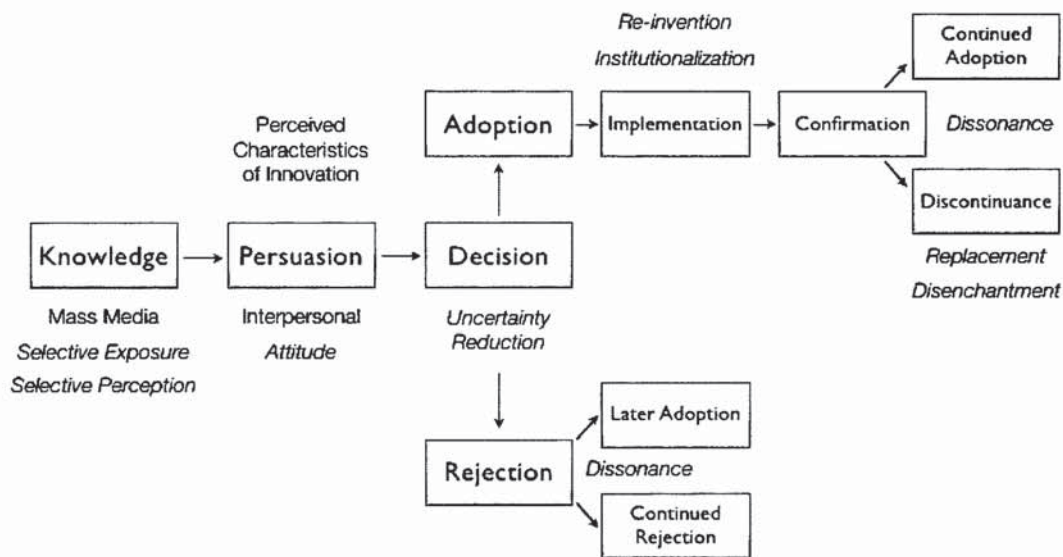
Mr. Khalil and Ms. Dagher asserted that it is very important to watch the growth on this level. When used correctly Twitter is a very effective way to build brand equity and transparency that leads to a deeper brand –consumer relationship. Retail industries will benefit the most from this medium (for customer service, product or service feedback, industry networking, promotions or contests, news or company updates).

Based on the above, we can conclude that Twitter is not yet the leading Social Media platform in Lebanon. It still needs some time to reach all customers. Its is obvious that till present, Facebook is still the leader but both companies are trying to integrate Twitter in all their campaigns knowing that the reach is high but the number of followers are not increasing dramatically and they will keep on stressing on Facebook for the time being.

This proves the Diffusion of Innovation theory used in this thesis; since with time customers will start using Twitter more and more, people will be adapting the innovation gradually.

Same applies for leading companies that are already on Twitter. At this point, we are still at the knowledge stage, and it will take time to reach the decision stage. In order to accomplish this, the development communication proposal is needed.

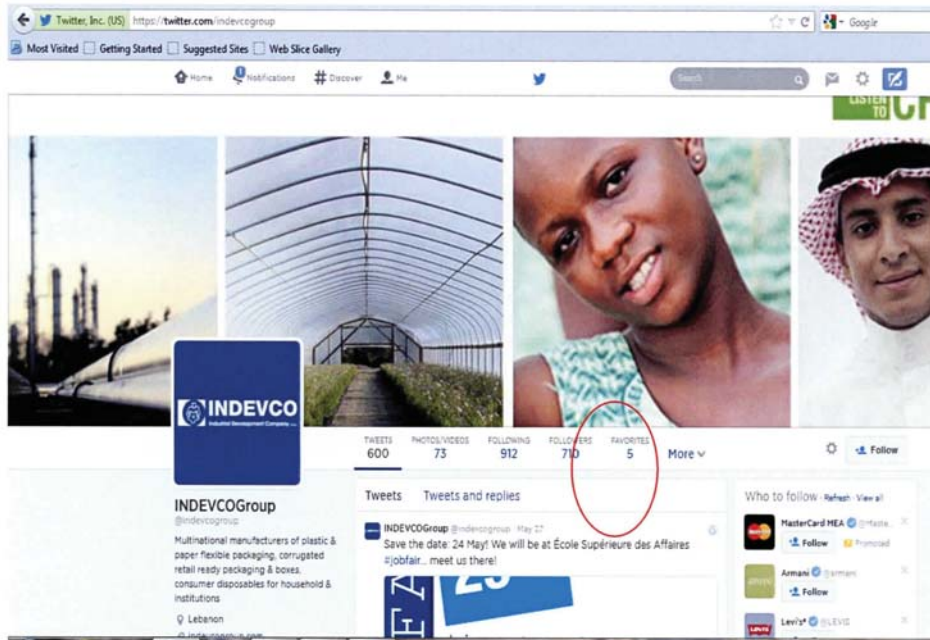
## Innovation-Decision Process



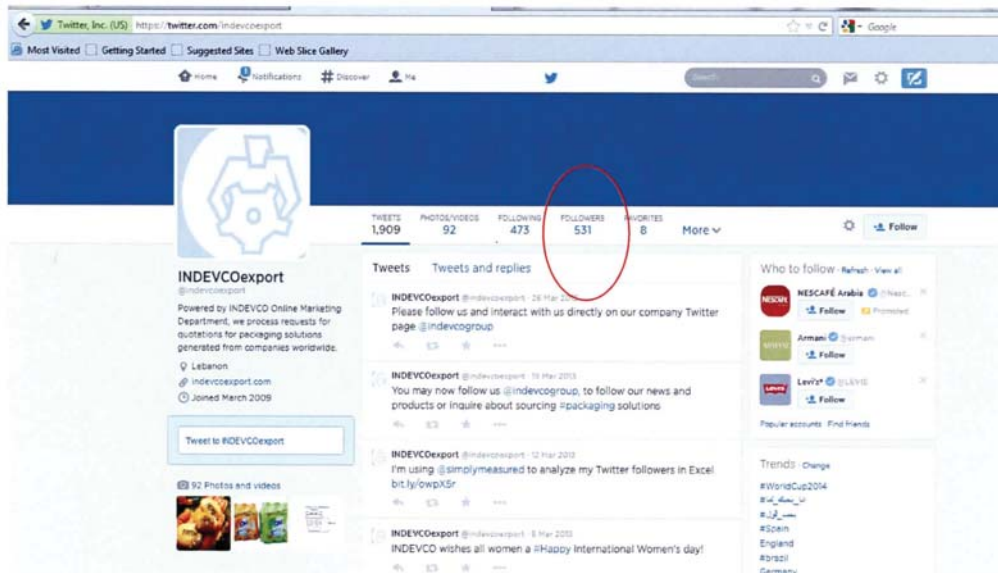
Rogers (2003)

Twitter pages managed by our interviewees:

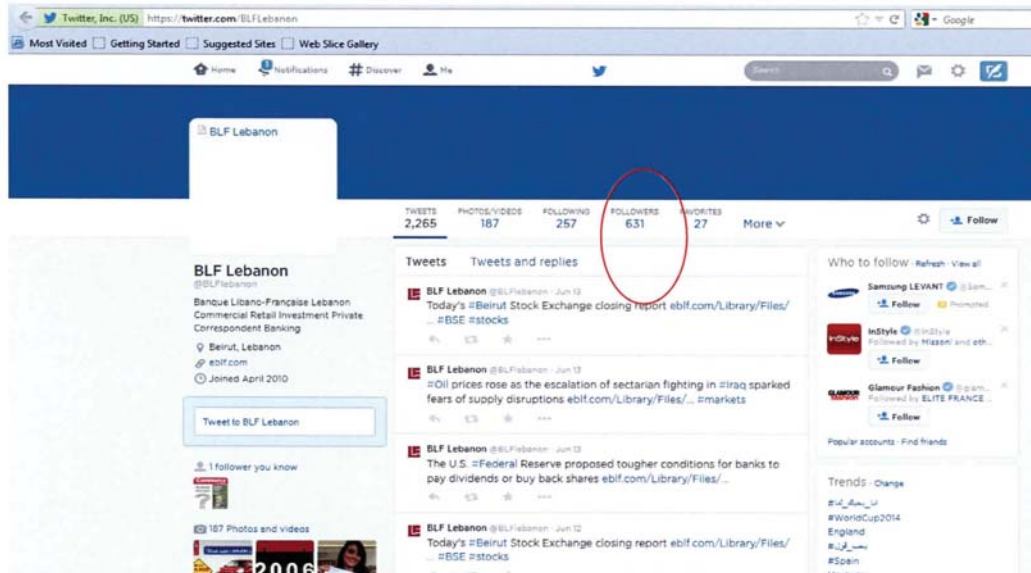
**INDEVCO Business to Customer page:**



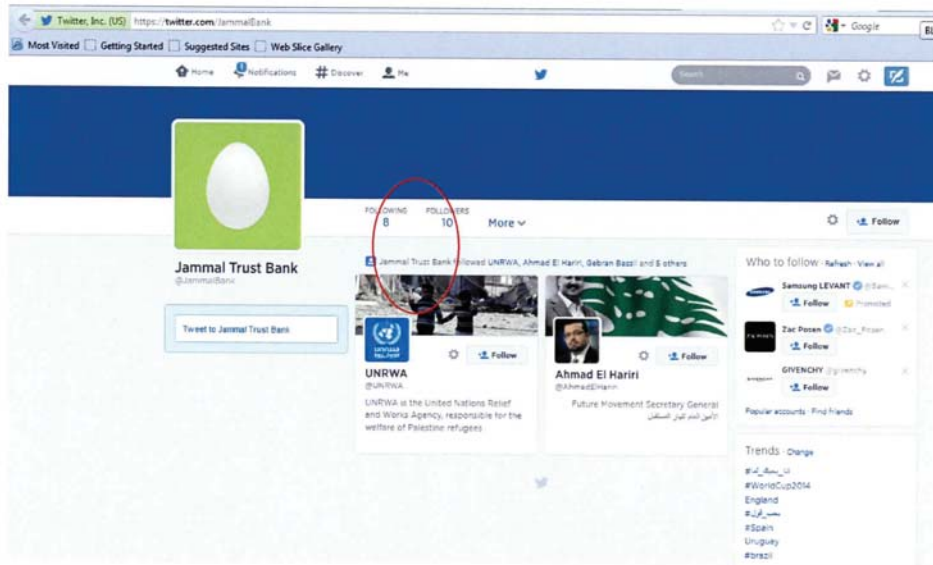
**INDEVCO Business to Business page:**



### Bank Libano-Française page:



### Jammal Trust Bank page:



After checking these pages, we can realize that the number of followers is very low. The interviewees were right: it is not the right time to use only Twitter for marketing.

## 5. ABC AND TSC - SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS:

The major comparison in this study was done between Facebook and Twitter but what about other social media platforms that both retail companies under study bring into play.

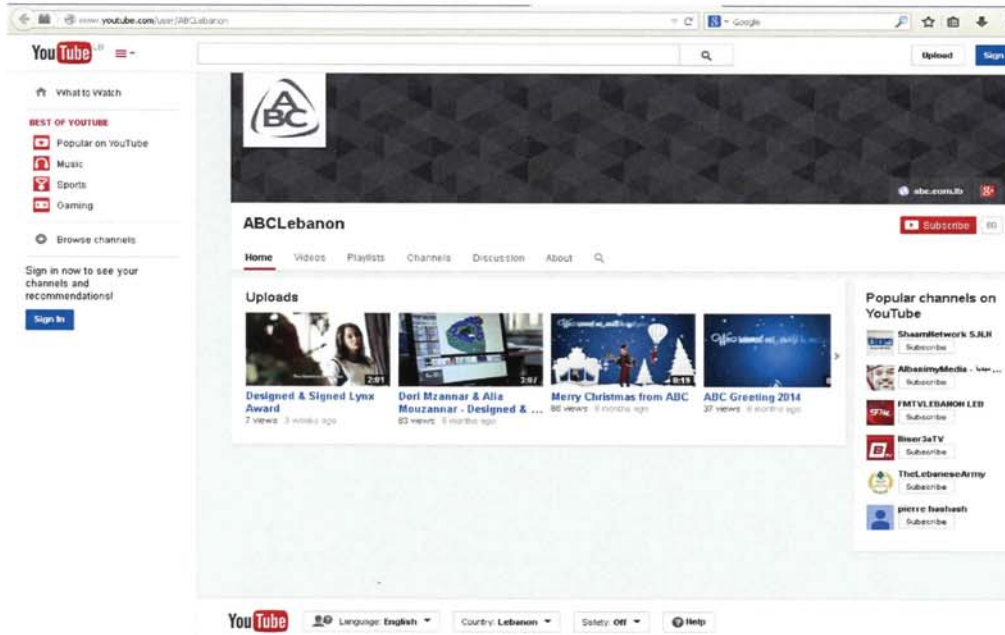
### 5.1 ABC CASE STUDY

Twitter page:

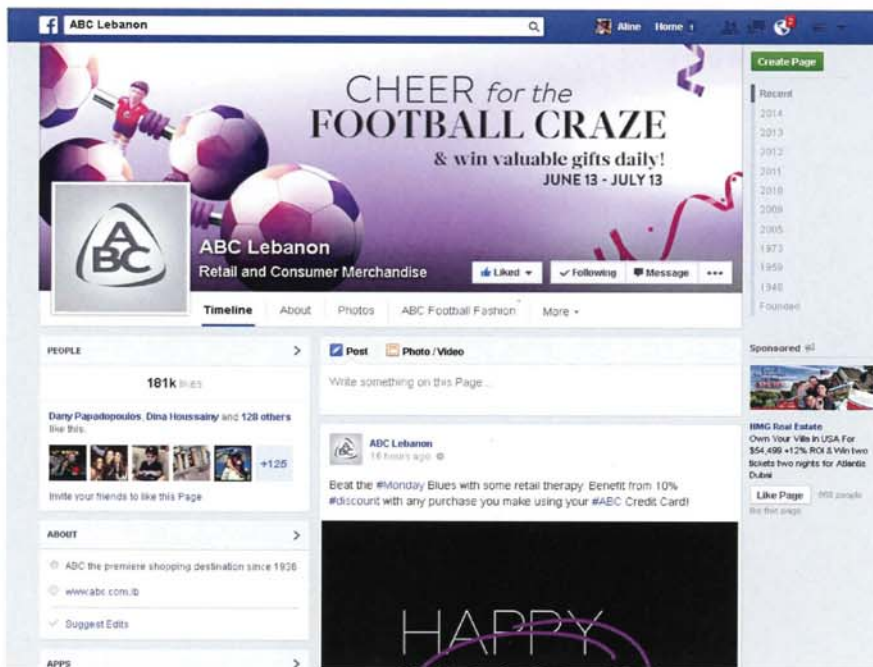


The image shows a screenshot of the ABC Lebanon Twitter profile page. The profile picture is a stylized 'ABC' logo. The header features a large banner image of a woman in a white top and patterned pants, and another woman in a green top and patterned pants, both in a desert-like setting. The profile information includes 1,994 tweets, 663 photos/videos, 520 retweets, 5,999 followers, and 716 following. The main content area shows a tweet asking 'When was Ets. Hagop Atamian founded?' with a photo of a watch. Below it is a tweet about a promotion: 'Add some style to your daily outfit with #ATAMIAN. Get the right answer for a chance to win a gift voucher worth \$50. (2)'. The bottom tweet says 'Where ever you are, download #ABC Mobile'. The right sidebar shows 'Who to follow' with accounts like NYSE, Who What Wear, and LACOSTE, and a 'TRENDS' section with topics like #amagoodproduct and #مباركلكم.

ABC YouTube page:



ABC Facebook page:



The number of views does not exceed the 90. As for the Facebook page, ABC reached approximately 181k of likes. On Twitter the number of followers did not surpass the 2000 people. Comparing the three platforms, we can identify that Facebook is the primary site.

## 5.2 TSC CASE STUDY

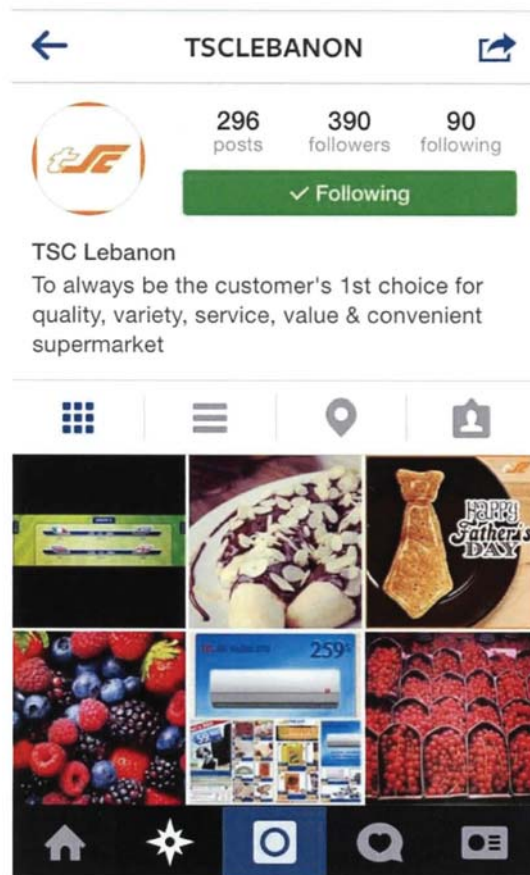
### Twitter page:





### TSC Facebook Page:

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for TSC Lebanon. The page header includes the name 'TSC Lebanon' and navigation options like 'Page', 'Activity', 'Insights', and 'Settings'. The main cover image features a green background with a trophy icon and the text 'GUESS & WIN' and 'TSC Lebanon Retail and Consumer Merchandise'. A post from 17 hours ago by Kerza Cullen describes a promotion: 'Who wants some delicious treats after a long day at work? Just insert a craft stick into each banana half and place in the freezer till frozen. Then dip into a hot mixture of melted chocolate and peanuts. Enjoy!'. The left sidebar shows 83k likes and a list of people who liked the page, including Rania Rached, Joe Hajj, and others. The right sidebar shows statistics for 'THIS WEEK' (1,577 Page Likes, 8,996 Post Reach) and a 'Recent' year list from 2014 to 1979.

**TSC Instagram Page:**

Same comparison was done on TSC Social Media platforms and we can easily recognize that Facebook is more popular by simply comparing the numbers of fans. On Facebook, TSC has till today 83k fans, on Twitter 446 followers and on Instagram they reached 390.

### 5.3 Focus Groups Results:

The first focus group consisted of 7 ABC customers aged between 20 and 30 five ladies and two men. The focus group took place in ABC Dbayeh on March 21<sup>st</sup> at 4 pm for one hour.

Regarding the second focus group for TSC clients, we had 10 attendees (6 Ladies and 4 Men). The age bracket was between 25 and 53. It took place in TSC Head Office Baabda on April 9 at 6 pm for one hour as well.

#### **Question 1: Joining Twitter**

ABC customers reported that they joined Twitter 2 to 3 years ago. TSC clientele under 40 said that they have Twitter accounts and they are active users and for the customers above 40, they do have accounts but they only check what is promoted with no reaction or interaction.

**Question 2:** customers were asked how often they log on to Twitter.

ABC participants answered that they check it every day but they are not real fans of this platform. On the other hand, TSC customers under 40 are active on Twitter they check it 5 times a week and one of them stays online. As for the participants above 40 they check every 2 to 3 days with no interaction, they are “silent users”.

**Question 3:** Concerning Twitter as a source of information: participants asserted that they read, interact and gather information more than generating content themselves. But it is worth mentioning here that TSC participants usually check TSC account to know about promotions.

**Question 4:** The majority of ABC customers follow several fashion retail companies and high end brands like Gallerie la Fayette, Channel, Dior, Maje, Sandro, Tommy Hilfiger... As for TSC customers they do not follow any other supermarket in Lebanon or abroad.

**Question 5:** Trust was a major issue discussed in the focus group. We realized that ABC customers do trust all information provided by ABC on Twitter and on Social Media. But in contrary, TSC customers have doubts about the promotions circulated via TSC Social Media platforms and one of them reported that when they go to buy the promotion and they never find it.

**Question 6:** Participants in both groups still prefer Facebook since it is easier and more efficient. In their words, Twitter needs to be more flexible and user-friendly.

**Question 7:** In the ABC Focus group, only one person recalled the egg hunt campaign promoted by ABC. As for TSC, none of the participants recollected any specific detail.

**Question 8:** Asking if the customers of the two retail industries follow them on Twitter both groups confirmed that they do.

Based on the above we realize that for the moment Lebanese customers in general are not heavy-users of Twitter. Facebook is more important at this stage. This conclusion leads us to say that for the time being companies cannot get rid of traditional media or even Facebook.

Marketers should always split their budget on Online Social Media and on traditional media in order to reach all targets which prove the Development communication theory. So according to this latter theory, customers need to be more educated about the new technology in order to follow the trends and to stay up to date regarding the new media. How to do so? By following the steps of the Development communication theory we can at some point achieve our goals in developing the community regarding the new technologies. First start working on individuals behaviour and intentional knowledge; as a second step enlarge your scope to reach a bigger social network ( Families, group of friends) , after that try to increase the level of participation in the society by creating training centres, giving easy access to the internet finally you can achieve the development stage.

## 6. LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study are enormous since no quantitative data was collected and all the research was based on qualitative techniques. Another big inconvenience is that Twitter is a fast changing platform; new information is released every day.

Furthermore, the focus group results may be subjective since all participants are loyal to the companies under study and they may not give objective feedback.

The number of interviewees is also limited and cannot give a holistic picture about the topic.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The usage of Twitter has been rising constantly.

For Lebanese retail companies, Twitter became essential since customers are spending more time on this platform. Based on the interviews, this study supports the statement that Social Media is a valuable tool to be used by Retailers in Lebanon to help them implement their marketing strategies but yet Twitter did not attain the phase that Facebook reached in Lebanon. All interviewees stated that the advantages of Twitter for their companies exceed the disadvantages or problems occurring through the usage by far and they all agreed that Twitter is relatively simple, fast and cost-efficient for retailers in Lebanon to communicate with their customers. The basic rule is to always respond to the client. The thesis concludes that retailers need to have a structured plan on how to use Twitter and how to design their communication and finally what to expect. Risks always exist while using any Social Media platform because it might cause a big loss in case they do any wrong step.

On another note, the interviews done and focus groups results showed clearly that Twitter is not the number one Social Media platform that Lebanese customers rely on. Facebook ranks first.

Opportunities that are created through communicating with customers via Twitter are extremely efficient. It is easier to target the market since you can have the users profile and accordingly you can know your clients' interests. Brand awareness is also increased while using Twitter because companies can reach a wider audience and can target directly its market. Not to forget that challenges exist while using Social Media platforms in general and especially Twitter. The big challenge that companies might face is the uncontrollability of the online Media.

To answer the hypotheses: retail companies in Lebanon should be using Twitter in their marketing strategy; it appears that the influence of Twitter is somehow minimal comparing to Facebook.

In general, all retailers should include Twitter in their marketing strategies; yet it should be accompanied with other Social Media tools.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has shown that Lebanese retail companies started using Twitter in their marketing strategies. The study was based on qualitative research; hence future research needs to employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodology. It is important to enlarge the interviewee sample and conduct a quantitative study in order to see if same results will be conveyed with larger patterns.

Besides, Twitter is a new platform for Lebanese that is why more time is required to make the most of its flexible features in the marketing field.

It is also important to investigate more on the consumer perspective.



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