Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty and Intention: Facebook as a Student Recruitment and Retention Channel

Raziye Nevzat

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Approval of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research

_____
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ali Hakan Ulusoy
Acting Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication and Media Studies.

_____
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ağah Gümüş
Dean, Faculty of Communication
and Media Studies

We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication and Media Studies.

_____
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ağah Gümüş
Supervisor

Examining Committee
_____

1. Prof. Dr. Aylin Göztaş   _____

2. Prof. Dr. Hasan Kemal Suher   _____

3. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Metin Ersoy   _____

4. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ağah Gümüş   _____

5. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anıl Kemal Kaya _____

ABSTRACT

Social Media Marketing has recently been adapted by many brands, including Higher Education Institutions. The cost of marketing through conventional media at a global scale could be very large therefore effective means of communications, campaigns and strategies should be employed for a stronger brand management. These strategies and campaigns should involve tools to strengthen brand trust, brand loyalty, intention and behavior which will improve the reliability of the products or services that can turn into sales.

In higher education, brand loyalty and brand trust takes another dimension as there is no product to be sold. Brand trust and brand loyalty however, is necessary for continuous student recruitment in higher education institutions. One of the means of cost effective communication to deliver the product's quality messages through instant communication with subscribers or followers, is social media.

This thesis, in two different studies interrogates whether social media reinforces brand trust and brand loyalty for current students in a Higher Education Institution. It also investigates whether social media has a role in motivating high school students' intention in their university choice. The results indicated that Facebook presence of Higher Education institutions strengthens brand trust and brand loyalty for current students however is not significantly related to high school students' intention to choose a university.

Keywords: Social Media, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, Intention, Higher Education Institutions.

ÖZ

Sosyal medya pazarlaması birçok marka, hatta yüksek öğrenim kurumları tarafından kullanılmaktadır. Güçlü marka yönetimi için geleneksel reklam ve pazarlama yöntemleri maliyetli olabileceğinden, iletişim ve etkili kampanya stratejilerini kullanmak kaçınılmaz olmuştur. Bu kampanya ve stratejiler marka güvenilirliğini ve sadakatini artıracak araçlar içermeli, güveni, niyeti, davranışı ve satışı artırmaya da yönelik olmalıdır.

Yüksek öğrenim alanında markaya olan güven ve sadakat satışı gerektiren bir ürün olmadığı için başka bir boyutta ele alınmaktadır. Adı geçen markaya güven ve sadakat yüksek öğrenim kurumlarına devamlı öğrenci akışının sağlanması bazında gerekli olup, önem taşımaktadır. Ürünün kalitesi hakkında takipçi veya abonelerle anlık iletişim kurmayı sağlayabilen, uygun maliyetli iletişim araçlarından birisi sosyal medya olarak tanımlanmıştır.

Bu tez sosyal medyanın marka sadakati ve marka güvenilirliğini destekleyip desteklemediğini yükseköğrenim kurumlarında hâlihazırda okuyan öğrenci ekseninde ölçmektedir. İkinci bir araştırma olarak da sosyal medyanın üniversite seçiminde, lise öğrencilerinin niyetleri ve davranışlarına olan etkisini de araştırmaktadır.

Sonuçlar yükseköğrenim kurumlarının Facebook'taki varlığının marka güvenirliği ve sadakatini güçlü kıldığını ortaya koymuştur. Ardışık çalışma sonucunda ise sosyal medyanın lise öğrencilerinin üniversite seçimi ve niyet olgusunun doğrudan ilişkisi olmadığı ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Marka Güveni, Marka Sadakati, Niyet, Yüksek

Öğrenim Kurumları.

DEDICATION

To My Mother

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SM   Social Media

SNS   Social Networking Sites

WWW   World Wide Web

HTML   Hypertext Markup Language

HEI   Higher Education Institutions

IMC   Integrated Marketing Communication

PBT   Planned Behavior Theory

EMU   Eastern Mediterranean University

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim of the Study

Increasing number of universities around the world has created a competitive market in Higher Education Industry as each institution seek to find new and better ways to recruit and retain students. It is thus crucial for universities to strengthen their brand for recruiting larger number and better-quality students in this competitive market. Between the years of 2000-2009, 1 Million students were in the global higher education system. (Becker & Kolster, 2012) The number of universities has increased from about 17500 in 2006 to about, 26500 in 2016 (IAU,2006; Webometrics, 2016) In recent years increasing number of universities around the globe enabled an easier mobility for students. In the last 10 years 26% of growth was observed in international student numbers as well as 77% growth in international students and 51% increase in the number of the universities. (ICEF, 2017; OECD, 2017)

Full time students with the intention to study abroad are expected to increase from 5,5 Million in 2016 to 8 Million in 2025 (OECD, 2006; Benson, 2015; OECD, 2016; UNESCO, 2016). A recent research however, depicted a slowing trend of slowing mobility due to vital reasons such as immigration policies of some countries, exchange rates between the currencies, tuition policy for foreign students and language instruction of some universities (OECD, 2017). Another reason shown for this slowing

trend is because some countries tend to open their own state or private universities to keep their students inland.

The rapid growth in the number of universities and the challenges in student mobility enforce Higher Education Institutions (hereafter HEI) to invest into communication methods, tools and platforms to strengthen its brand by advertising certain elements to its stakeholders in an emerging competitive market. Although the university community is formed by academicians, employees, staff and alumni; the HEI marketing primarily focuses on potential student candidates, entrants and currently registered students.

Although there has been and extensive research on the relationship between university brand and its stakeholders, the role of social media in strengthening brand trust and enhancing the intention of student recruitment and retention in higher education have not been an area of focus for scholars.

1.2 Problem Statement

Most universities are present on social media due its fast news dissemination feature. HEI that choose to show presence are HEI that are aware of the potential candidates who are millennials also described as digital natives between the ages of 18-29 and internet users that receive information very fast (Prensky, 2001; Jones, Ramanau, Croos and Healing, 2010) The main difference between digital natives and digital immigrants is that digital natives are exposed to internet in their entire life however digital immigrants discover technology at some parts in their lives; some of them are better at it and some of them are not (Prensky, 2001).

It is not surprising that HEI is trying to reach digital natives through technology because they spend more than twelve hours a day with digital technology (J.J. Arnett, 2015) and not only they use it for communication purposes and news dissemination, but they also use technology to purchase products, get to know new trends and follow brands. They embrace brands and get actively involved, providing positive or negative word-of-mouth for the brand (Needham, 2008). Although HEI use social media to stay up-to-date with the technology or convey messages about the existing values and services of their brands; the effect of social media on retaining brand trust and brand loyalty is an area that are overseen by the scholars. The importance of how social media as a communication platform enable HEI to increase brand trust and brand loyalty and how social media motivates intention and behavior in choosing a university has been investigated in this thesis.

1.3 Background Information

Balaji et al. (2016) argues that strong identification of students brings committed role performance in the institution and results in a "long lasting relationship with the university" (p. 3023). The university brand is also discussed within the pros and cons of branding by researchers (Stensaker, 2007). However, there are also critiques over branding academia as its brand itself conflicts with the value of education (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007) but as Hope et al (2009) manifests, collective value creation in brand communities is possible. Other counter views see brand and HEI relationship skeptical since commercialization of education may come within the needs of industry (Wilmott, 2003) and may conflict with educational values. However, despite all the counter views, a strong brand image is still perceived as a "powerful source of competitive advantage" (Melewar and Akel, 2005, p. 41).

With the emergence of web 2.0, social media has become the aforementioned powerful source and platform where brands represent themselves in various forms. Not only they target purchasing but also, they target maintaining positive and long-term relationship with its followers. In HEI, this relationship may start from high school years as each student aims or targets to study in a university since they have known themselves as a student. This could be due to positive word-of-mouth, strong presence of the HEI brand on conventional and social media, a graduate or an acquaintance from that university.

Due to this considerable need, HEI has recently been integrating social media strategies to their Integrated Marketing Communication strategies due to its widespread use to represent the positive image of their brand to potential and current students. One of the main reasons for HEI to be present on social media is the number of potential candidates and students using social media platforms to obtain news or follow brands. Generation Y, also known as digital natives -people who are born between 1981 and 1999 (Prensky, 2001), are in the target frame of today's HEI. A new generation description has also emerged as Millennials (people who are born after the year 2000) and Generation Z (people who are born between 1995-2012) therefore universities attempt to catch these early users online by creating a brand community because these users value other people's opinions and provide feedback (E-marketer, 2011). Generation Y prefers user generated content such as videos and blogs (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008) and are heavy digital media consumers with 10 hours

daily internet usage (Forbes, 2017)[1]. Consequently, HEI aims to create brand communities on social media to target these potential students.

Ho (2015), reiterates that the relationship between strong Facebook presences of companies has a positive influence on brand identification of the customers and the brand community.

1.4 The Importance and the Organization of the Study

Although social media is studied as a marketing tool in HEI, limited research has been conducted on brand communities; how these communities trigger brand trust and brand loyalty in student recruitment and retention and whether intention is formed in social media.

In this thesis the means of establishing brand identification through reputation on HEI Facebook page is thoroughly investigated. The effect of Facebook as a platform for brand representation and factors that enable brand identification, brand trust and brand loyalty in student recruitment and student retention is also explored. A survey is conducted to both current and prospective students to measure whether social media, mainly Facebook, strengthens brand trust and brand loyalty in HEI as well as how social media may form intention with certain behavioral factors.

In Chapter 2, the definition and components of branding are discussed along with how branding differs in a corporate and Higher Education Institution. Social Media is also thoroughly investigated as a technological development, marketing platform and an online community. In Chapter 3, theoretical framework is primarily formed with Carl

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[1] https://www.forbes.com/sites/nelsongranados/2017/06/20/gen-z-media-consumption-its-a-lifestyle-not-just-entertainment/

Hovland's Communication and Persuasion and Uses and Gratifications Theory, Attitude Theory, Hyper- Symbolic Interactionism Theory and Planned Behavior is used as sub- theories to explain and form proposed hypotheses. In Chapter 4 methodology of the research is thoroughly explained and in Chapter 5, discussion on the research results are put forth. Chapter 6 is the conclusion and suggestions for further research section of this thesis.

1.5 Research Design and Hypotheses

This research is designed as two parts and around several hypotheses that aim to interrogate whether social media strengthens brand trust and brand loyalty of current students and whether social media influences intention, motivation thus behavior of high school students in choosing a university.

Hypotheses:

Study 1

Hypothesis 1: Strength of the University Facebook community is related to the level of identification with the university community

Hypothesis 2: Strength of the University Facebook community is related to the level of identification with the university brand.

Hypothesis 3: Identification with the university community is related to the level of university brand trust.

Hypothesis 4: Identification with the university brand is related to the level of university brand trust

Hypothesis 5: University brand trust is related to the level of university loyalty

Hypothesis 6: University loyalty is related to the level of in role behaviors.

Hypothesis 7: University loyalty is related to the level of extra role behaviors.

Study 2

Hypothesis 1 (Main Hypothesis): Intention of students to attend a university based on what they see on social media is related to their attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control about social media.

Hypothesis 1a: Intention of students to attend a university based on what they see on social media is related to their attitudes.

Hypothesis 1b: Intention of students to attend a university based on what they see on social media is related to their subjective norms

Hypothesis 1c: Intention of students to attend a university based on what they see on social media is related to their perceived behavioral control about social media.

Hypothesis 2: Student attitudes about social media is related to their behavioral beliefs and their evaluation of its outcomes.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived behavioral control of students about social media is related to their control beliefs and perceived facilitation.

Hypothesis 4: Subjective norms of students about social media is related to their normative beliefs and their motivation to comply.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The first part of the research was conducted among Eastern Mediterranean University students who were currently enrolled at the university programs and the second part of the research was conducted on high school students on their last year who were contemplating on enrolling to a university. Although the research included respondents from many countries in the first study, the scale of the study would be broader and international if high school students from different countries were included in the second study.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, branding and social media has been reviewed in a detailed and an elaborate angle. Primarily, the definition of branding in businesses is discussed and the difference between corporate branding and institutional branding due to their different nature has been stated. Institutional branding has then been discussed along with Higher Education Institutional Branding with three different perspectives such as "values and reputation", "internal branding" and "external branding". The updated definition, history and extensive usage of web and social media is discussed in the marketing and generational perspective.

2.1 Branding and Corporate Branding as a Concept

Branding is defined as to "make known the attributes of the organization's identity in the form of a clearly defined proposition" (Balmer 2001, p. 281). In the marketing literature, branding is mainly related to a company's image and reputation and public acceptance. In corporate branding, a strong brand is usually associated with its capacity of implementing ownership, pleasurable experiences, representation of values, constructing individual identities and symbols (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Many brands, nowadays, are focusing on creating a strong image on many platforms for both enhancing sales and maintaining a permanent image. According to Mc Enally and De Chernatony (1999), effective and successful branding should be taken into consideration from two frames of reference: Brands under the control of management and brands under the control of consumers. In the past, what the consumers

experienced with brands was seeing the image or the symbol of the brand from the corporate point of view; in other words, from the "sender-end" perspective (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Galbraith (1986), states that branding had a hierarchical attitude to the consumer, rather than something done by the consumer.

For many years, corporate branding has been associated with product branding and how a specific logo is associated with the name of a company. The importance of corporate branding was usually overseen as there was no recognition of the difference between product branding and corporate branding as well as the existence of many contributors and stakeholders in corporate branding. (Balmer and Gray, 2003) . The fact that corporate branding retains its practices at an organizational level separates it from product branding or individual service (Knox and Bickerton, 2003).

In the recent years importance of bringing all the stakeholders together to enhance a multi view-point angle has recently become a crucial matter for corporates as branding is nowadays highly associated and constructed with consumer viewpoint. The biggest stakeholder of corporate branding has now become the consumer that uses the product and expresses an idea over the product. This is a point where Schmitt (1999) argues to dwell branding and marketing concepts in which a satisfied consumer experience is created (Balmer and Gray, 2003).

2.1.1 Branding and Brand Equity in Marketing Communications

Marketing has radically changed in the last fifty years due to rapid changes in technology and constant changes of the marketplace. Marketing communications became essential for many companies as communicating with the consumer have enabled an approach for companies to improve its services and products. In general, marketing communications includes representing the brand in different platforms as

shown by Keller (2009). For companies that value having a voice (Keller, 2009) branding has become an essential element (Aaker and Joachimstler, 2000; Kapferer, 2005). The intangible value that branding add to a company is established through advertisements, symbols and assets that a company associates with its product. All these assets are defined as brand equity and a strong brand equity and marketing communications may pave the way for the consumer to establish a stronger relationship with the brand as well as a motivation to communicate with the brand more "accompanying cognitive and affective reactions" (Keller, 2009, p. 140). According to Keller and Lehmann (2006), brands play an important role in determining the effectiveness of marketing efforts such as advertising and channel placement. Finally, brands are assets in the financial sense. Brands, manifest their impact at three primary levels customer market, product market and financial market. The value raised by these various benefits is often called "brand equity" (p. 740).

Companies with a vision to build stronger brands have usually set the abovementioned elements of brand equity as a goal and this goal is usually includes all the stakeholders. Balmer (2001), indicates that, in corporate branding, emotions of all the stakeholders is manifested. The companies that tend to consider all the emotions these stakeholders develop an "identity". This identity is usually accepted by the consumer as the primary aim of a corporate is to establish a relationship with the consumer. Keller (2009) states that the consumer may be willing to continue his/her relationship with the brand if they have a positive experience and they may event contribute to the brand equity by adding a value to the brand with their experience (Luo and Donthu, 2006).

Positive experience lies in the heart of brand equity and effective marketing communication. Not only positive experience is expressed because of product

branding, an experience itself of a service is an institution has enabled many institutions to consider branding although they are not engaged in selling any kind of product. Richard Bagozzi et al (1992) argue that decision making is conditioned by a goal. Bagozzi et al establishes a relationship between intention-attitude-behavior and reiterates that an individual makes an emotional judgment of an objective situation. The evaluation is subjective as it is an emotional response and it has a personal meaning to that individual. After, comes the appraisal process where an individual may come out with a certain emotional reaction to a brand.

It is thus argued that a positive emotional reaction may result in consumer satisfaction after the product/service appraisal process because of positive emotional experience with a certain brand.

2.1.2 Reputation and Values in Branding

Although brand equity and branding are usually defined as an intangible asset, it is crucial to underline what values and assets evoke associations of positive attributes and benefits in terms of conceptualization (Barich and Kotler, 1991). One of the vital positive attributes of brand is positive experience which always induces a good result for customer. Abundant positive experience results in good reputation and a good reputation is highly valuable for a company for a sustainable image. Waller and Younger (2017) assert that a good reputation is an asset in the commercial world. According to the authors, reputation that can ruin or elevate a brand, may come in many forms; thus, building and maintaining a right kind of reputation may assist in better operation.

Corporates build reputation in many ways. Some of them work through their reputation with their products or service, some work on the concepts like quality or safety.

Temple (2006) illustrates how Volvo brand is associated with safety and Waller and Younger (2017) demonstrates how "Made in Germany" is equal to quality, whereas "Made in China" is simply equal to cheap products. Reputation, therefore is "certain good values, to which those marketing the product will legitimately draw the attention" (Waller and Younger 2017, p. 17) In this case, one must argue whether *corporate communication* and *institutional communication* share the same values. Although many corporates share their values to promote their products as well as their reputation, HEI managements lead the way for a better reputation management as there isn't a tangible product to sell. Education, however as a service with all its values is present for HEI marketers to promote. As Temple (2006) quotes from, Barnett (2000, p.7) there are "two sets of values in the university-rooted respectively in dialogic life and performativity".

The counter arguments against universities having a dilemma between concentrating on producing knowledge rather than promoting itself has been changing forms with the new technology.

2.1.3 Higher Education Branding

2.1.3.1 HEI, Values and Reputation

Branding in Higher Education Industry has always been acknowledged with universities having a *good reputation*. In HEI, a good reputation is equal to a strong brand equity. Nowadays, higher education institutions compete in the market with normal corporates. Hence, focuses on importance of corporate branding in higher education (Curtis; Abratt; Minor, 2009) thus engages in similar behavior in regular commercial marketing (Bunzel 2007, Hemslewy Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). Corporate branding mainly deals with the process of sustaining a mutual relationship

with company, staff and stakeholders (Curtis; Abratt; Minor, 2009) and this is very similar to how an educational institution establishes a bond with its students and graduates when it wants to maintain its brand as a well-known establishment. Some scholars argue that education as a concept or as an ideology cannot be identified with corporate branding due to its core value in the society (Hemsley-Brwon & Goonawardana, 2007). However, in this competitive era, it would be a disadvantage for HEI not to use branding as an effective marketing tool in order to strengthen its reputation within the industry. Apart from conventional informative marketing tools, HEI that focus on branding within the institution to recruit and retain students, strengthens its brand more due to its continuous effort in maintaining good reputation. The strength of each HEI may differ according to what value they want to project in order to recruit and retain students. Some choose to put forward the quality of its education, some its student diversity, some its infrastructure and some its staff. The overall projection of these components however may create a stronger brand perception and HEI use different platforms to project these components. In order for these components to be stronger, however; requires a process to establish values and self-definitions by "asking questions such as "what are we", "what do we stand for", "what do we want to be" and "what do we want to stand for" as well as defining its characteristics and identity" (Waeraas and Solbaakk, 2009).

There are numerous studies which put forward that established values and self-definitions incorporate a *brand personality* to a brand. According to Aaker (1997), a brand personality is a set of human characteristics associated with a brand (p. 347). Aaker's dimensions are listed as 1) sincerity, 2) excitement, 3) competence, 4) sophistication and 5) ruggedness by Rauschnabel et al. (2016) that also claim that

"brand personality is more effective in influencing outcome variables for more mature brands….as many universities have long-standing histories" (p. 3078).

2.1.3.2 Internal Branding in HEI

The literature on HEI branding mainly deals with external branding since sustainable branding results in good reputation and good reputation is always attractive for prospective students. Rex Whisman (2009), on the contrary, raises concern over how internal branding is a crucial asset for a university. The author states that "passionate employees" are a university's important intangible asset" (p. 368) and when communications and marketing professionals develop brand strategies that are not supported internally, consumers feel betrayed and frustrated. Not surprisingly, the reputation of the institution suffers and the branding initiative becomes a scapegoat for larger problems" (p. 367) . Whisman's remark is drawing attention to a problem many HEI are not aware of. The structures of universities are formed by staff, students, alumni and parents. Students only stay at the institution maximum for five years, a time frame insufficient to learn the values of a university or learn them from a member of the staff. The same is valid for the staff; it is possible that they might have minimum interaction with the students thus would be unable to work together to disseminate the values for a stronger brand presence.

2.1.3.3 External Branding in HEI

The reason for any institution to require a strong brand is due to the fact that branding may create positive attitude towards any institution (Curtis; Abratt; Minor. 2009). The positive experience has to be a continuous fact for the majority of the consumers, so the positive experience may transform to positive attitude and then behavior. Temple (2006) questions how this positive experience as a result of strong branding, may occur

in HEI and concludes that like every other institution a good brand comes with a good *product.*

According to the author, the products ultimate producer is the customer themselves. They decide on how qualified the product is. He gives Oxford University as an example and mentions that the university prefers to register academically successful students to reiterate the quality of the students. Temple also mentions that the quality of the university's brand depends on its sustainable strategy on registering qualified students.

Doyle (2001), as quoted in Temple (2006), also positions a successful brand at three distinctive characteristics: "an effective product, a distinctive identity and added values". Recalling that the values play a significant role in effective branding, the concept an effective product needs to be explored in order to make a distinction between a concrete product on sale and a service or an intangible asset provided by a company. HEI do not sell a product but provide a service. The more qualified this service or the intangible asset of the service, the better reputation it builds. This intangible asset or the reputation is also identified as the *image* of the institution.

The image of an institution can be defined as the public perception, in other words, how the institution is perceived externally. Some scholars such as Lawlor define this as the "brand identity", who reiterate that this image or the identity is "the essence of how you would like alumni, prospective students, legislators and the public to perceive your institution" (Lawlor, 1998, p. 19). For Sevier (1994), *image* is the belief and attitudes that people hold about an institution. The author categorizes four different aspects of why students choose a college or a university.

These aspects are:

1. Image or reputation

2. Cost

3. The availability of a particular major.

4. Location

In the aforementioned study, Sevier also informs that when students were requested to choose among the four factors, students consistently voted for *image*. This probably depicts how the process of university enrollment depends on this external image perceived by public and how this image consistently controls the student flow in the university. Having said that a successful branding equation is formed with good reputation and image, many HEI intentionally work on a solid, quality based and success oriented image to increase the potential student recruitment because prospective students are more likely to process their college choice based on the brand of the institution (Judson et al. 2008, p. 58).

Another factor for a university or a college choice is positive word-of-mouth. In literature, word-of-mouth is described as oral feedback or communication about a product or a service (Arndt, 1967) and positive word-of-mouth could increase a brand's reputation since it could encourage or develop an attitude or a behavior. Richard Bagozzi's A*ttitude Theory* is once again worth mentioning here as positive word of mouth is highly related with emotional and affective response of an individual.

The outcomes of internal and external branding result in positive word-of-mouth, successful image and reputation as well as sustainable student enrollment, which again

contributes to branding as the image will be nourished with high number of student enrollment, which may mean a high percentage in student choice.

2.1.4 Student Mobility's Effect on Branding and Marketing in HEI

As higher education students engage in promotional activities, they have wider options to evaluate when choosing a university. In an article by Anna Esaki-Smith of Times Higher Education[2], a prestigious institution that provides global Higher Education coverage, it is claimed that education at a "branded university carries immeasurable benefits such as entry into a prestigious alumni network, admiration of peers and accolades from parents." The same article however, mentions a decline 2% downfall in international undergraduate admissions to US universities in 2017-2018 due to visa and immigration policies (Times Higher Education, 2017). Thus, although having a diploma from a university with a strong brand may open doors to a successful career, the ongoing challenges in the Middle East, Africa and even in Europe prevents students to leave for a better education.

In this case, working on strengthening the brand with immense marketing strategies becomes more important for HEIs since the challenge in marketing in 2017-2018 is not only the competitors but also the changing paradigms of the students' choice in education.

For a better marketing approach to the international market, HEI turn their face to social media which is an enormous marketing platform to disseminate the perception of brands and how their brand is comparable to the others when it comes to finding a

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[2] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/ten-trends-transforming-international-student-mobility

better job in a challenging world politics, a competitive job seeking industry but most of all, completing an education in a safe environment.

2.2 New Media and Marketing Communications

With the emergence of new media platforms marketing communications has immensely changed. For years, corporate marketing strategies were based on launching the product, advertising the product and selling the product. The communication model was one-way communication and the feedback of the consumers were not an effective element in marketing. Since new media entered into people's lives, it provided a competitive advantage and enabled people to be a part of the marketing activities of the companies. Hennig Thurau et al. (2010) reiterate that consumers are actively involved in the new media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and they can even act as *retailers*. Direct marketing strategies of big companies enhanced; door-to-door and personal sales shared their success with online sales; consequently companies had to involve these retailers to their strategies by reconsidering how online feedback could contribute to the sales and performances of products and services.

The *new* marketing communications of new media gave an opportunity to the customers to *like* and receive notifications of anything they like or they want to buy. This clearly made marketing more competitive as the range of products and variety of promotional methods were introduced by companies. Creative user generated content encouraged new media platforms to design their algorithm more user friendly day by day to make the products or services, thus the platforms, more accessible and attractive.

2.3 Social Media and the Development of Web 1.0 to 4.0

The human interaction on the internet has tremendously improved over the past fifteen years. In this technologically driven era, users have first read information, built information, structured information and sold information over the development of the web. Established by Tim Burners Lee, the early stages of the internet were based on Web 1.0 which was based on information that could only be read by the users. For this reason Web. 1.0 was called *read-only*. (Aghaei et al. 2012), a static construction that was used for disseminating information. Web 1.0 could easily be defined as the cognitive era of the web since people used it to learn more particulars. Web 2.0 was first introduced by Dale Dougherty of Medialive international and it was designed to be more participatory. Users were able to use links, tags and application through the web hence they started to gain control over the content. Blogs, Podcasts and Social Networks are some of the leading tools of web. 2.0. The introduction of Web 2.0 is accepted to be a threshold for social media. Christian Fuchs (2011) indicates that the need for Web 2.0 is a result of ongoing human cooperation and communication with the rise of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Fuchs evaluates Web 2.0 along with Max Weber's notion of "social action" since communication and collaboration is based on the action of others. According to Fuchs :

"Browsing the web is a non-social action, but communicating (e.g., in a chat room, by instant messaging or co-operating (e.g., by collectively writing a wiki) with others on the Internet is *Social Action* in the Weberian sense. Web 2.0 and 3.0 signify an expansion of the meaning of sociality in the Internet…" (p. 99)

The collective action on Web 2.0 is a breakthrough in human communication. With the introduction of Web 2.0, one way communication has transformed to two –way communication on the internet. Web 2.0 has simply provided an online community thus reaching different communities and targeting them as potential network of customers has become easier for companies. Hence, O'Reilly (2005) defines Web 2.0 as "the business revolution in the computer industry"

Web 3.0 is described as the *Semantic Web* in the literature. Introduced by Tim Berners Lee, it was usually thought to enable meaning making process through the web applications. Solanki and Dongaonkar (2016) exemplify this meaning making process of Web 3.0 with the following:

"If someone is searching for the flight timings of a particular country, a semantic search will return flight times to this country as well as the details of the weather conditions and other useful information such as hotel, restaurant and car reservations."

Not only Web 3.0 made it more meaningful for the user to stay on the internet, but also delivered user-friendly, easy-to access and time saving features. These features were a mine to dig for the business in order to make use of these enriched features along with the pleased community.

2020 is assumed to be the year of Web 4.0. Web 4.0 is described as the "Symbiotic Web… where machines can interact with mind controlled interfaces" (Solanki and Dongaonkar, 2016). The Web 4.0 process has actually commenced with internet bots on social media; the automated robots talking to people via instant messaging services.

In May 2016, Facebook launched chatbots[3] where companies were allowed to deliver customer, e-commerce, interactive messages etc. This has brought social media marketing to a new level because a social media platform was taking over the human touch of the customer services and guidance. In July however, it was announced that the chatbots were inventing their own language[4] consequently were shut down by Facebook. It is quite clear that social media corporates like Facebook is testing Artificial Intelligence with businesses for marketing and although human activity is leading marketing segments of the companies, the future holds robots and Web 4.0 self-driven features integrated with the marketing world, serving people. This may result in using more technology for a more pleased consumer profile in the marketing world.

2.4 Conventional Media Advertising versus Social Media Advertising

The interactive feature of Facebook, the leading platform of social media with over 2 Billion users[5] is naturally the biggest social media marketing platform in the marketing world. Facebook's features that encourage businesses to open a page and advertise its products and services by paid posts enable businesses to reach more people than they normally would. Conventional advertising however, mainly targeted local markets for years than turned to international markets with published international newspapers, magazines, billboards and television. In order to reach to a broader market, international companies often had to sign agreements with local partners to reach consumers in a more *known* way.

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[3] https://developers.facebook.com/docs/workplace/integrations/custom-integrations/bots
[4] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-4747914/Facebook-shuts-chatbots-make-language.html
[5] https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/

With the emergence of social media marketing, companies took this power back to themselves by choosing what to advertise, when to advertise and how to advertise. Not only it became easier to reach existing customers, companies have now the opportunity to locate potential customers just by exploring them through their interest.

Although new media is going through the hey-days of the golden era of digital marketing, there has been abundant criticism on its broad usage. An article[6] in Telegraph (2013) quoted a report by Ofcom, stating that young people is moving away from television whereas a Forbes article[7] (2013) reported that people prefer to receive news online more. According to an analytical report[8] in statistic portal, the conventional media usage was approximately 67 hours and 33 minutes in 2011 and this number is expected to decrease to six hours in 2018. The same report depicts the digital media usage forecast to increase from 214 minutes to 361 minutes.

Technology clearly had pressurized the conventional media in many ways. Consequently, many newspapers moved their news dissemination priority to online platforms such as internet newspapers and official Facebook newspaper pages that belongs to their own company, televisions moved to live broadcasts from Facebook and companies moved product launches mainly to Facebook and recently to Instagram.

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[6]
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/media/11146439/How-young-viewers-are-abandoning-television.html
[7] https://www.forbes.com/sites/davelavinsky/2013/03/08/is-traditional-marketing-still-alive/#4185f13b3806
[8] https://www.statista.com/statistics/297054/consumer-media-consumption-type/

In comparison with conventional media advertising, social media advertising has several advantages for businesses. Social Media is:

a) Cost Effective

Weinberg (2009) states that one of the main advantages of social media use for businesses, is cost related. The fact that people spread the news about a product before the company makes an effort to do so, decrease the cost of advertising expenses even though people tend to care about the personal experiences of a product.

b) Marketing to specific target

Another reason is Facebook and Instagram's effective geo-targeting and demographic targeting, allow companies to spend money on a particular product for a particular period of time. Companies can market product for Christmas or Eid products right before Christmas or Eid, to countries in which Christmas or Eid is celebrated the most whereas universities can advertise for programs and scholarships right before the university exam entrance examination of that particular country. This also encourages selective perception of that particular product of service.

c) Two-way or Interactive Communication

Steuer (1992) identifies interactivity with active audience modifying content. This enables people to provide feedback on a product or a service, compliment on a use of a product and recommend a product, or complaint about a product. In this case the company can take control of the complaints if they intervene at the right time. Some scholars however suggest that this is more a disadvantage rather than an advantage since user feedback cannot be controlled at all times by companies, which may lead to several crises.

2.5 Social Media and Integrated Marketing Communications

Social Media has emerged in people lives after the development of Web 2.0. The interactive asset of Web 2.0 has enabled people to generate content which made companies and institutions to compete with creative individuals. The interactivity and speed of social media provided faster communication and businesses started to direct their businesses to social media and added their social media presence to their marketing strategies.

Many scholars defined Integrated Marketing Communications as major marketing and communication improvement (Kitchen&Schultz, 1999, 2000), an effective marketing strategy plan (Schultz, Tannebaum and Lauterborn, 1993), a strategy where all stakeholders are involved (Gronstedt, 2000) and an interactive and systematic plan in marketing. (Porcu, Del-Barrio Garcia& Kitchen, 2012). Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan and McDonald (2005), claim that Integrated Marketing Communication strategies are highly related to brand equity strategies. Authors note that focusing on repetitive communication of brand identity may lead to a more effective IMC strategy therefore to a stronger brand equity.

Integrated Marketing Communication model usually consists of communicational and advertising messages on Public Relations, Billboards, Direct Marketing, Sales Promotion and advertisement on conventional media. Oancea and Elena (2012) proposed a new model for IMC stating that the former models theoretically do not include external variables such as consumer behavior, including that online marketing is now a component of IMC; taking the sociological variables and the stimuli into consideration, that may affect the consumer behavior. The online marketing concept

primarily was based on World Wide Web marketing, that is to say company websites engaging in selling activities and reaching out to customers for potential sales and commercial opportunities. (Hamill and Gregory, 1997). Oancea and Elena (2012) identify the importance of consumer behavior in Integrated Marketing Communications plan and illustrate that more behavioral factors should be taking into consideration in planning and executing the strategies of Integrated Marketing Communications. These factors, as can be seen in Figure 1 are family, groups, culture, subculture and other external stimuli. These factors, according to the authors, should work in parallel with IMC strategies and consumer groups.

Sociological variables

- Family
- Groups of appurtenance
- Reference groups
- Social class
- Culture
- Subculture

External stimuli

Price
Quality
Packaging
Brand
Emotional value
Attributes of the product
Offers

Choosing a product

Integrated marketing communication

Communicational message:

Instruments of integrated marketing communication:
- Advertising through mass-media
- Sales promotion
- Direct marketing
- Public relations
- The sales representatives
- Online marketing

Target audience: Actual and/or potential custumers

Consumer behaviour

- Purchase
- Non-purchase

Feedback

Feedback

Figure 1: Model of Integrated Marketing Communication (Oancea and Elena, 2015)

In its early stages, with its customer potential, social media had already started to become a part of Integrated Marketing Communication and with the rapid growth of social media, nowadays, it would not be wrong to state that social media marketing is a vital sub area of Integrated Marketing Communication. Many scholars state that social media is replacing conventional media in most parts of the world and has become the leading platform for marketing management and marketing communications. The main reason for this is because it is easy to track consumer behavior in social media consequently easier to integrate IMC strategies to brands. Mangold and Faulds (2009) introduced the new communication paradigm in order to indicate how social media is now a crucial part of Integrated Marketing Communication and how consumers are now in charge in creating purchasing intentions as well as companies. In short, for Integrated Marketing Communications, social media is an innovation that is situated on user and consumer interaction (Lee, 2013).
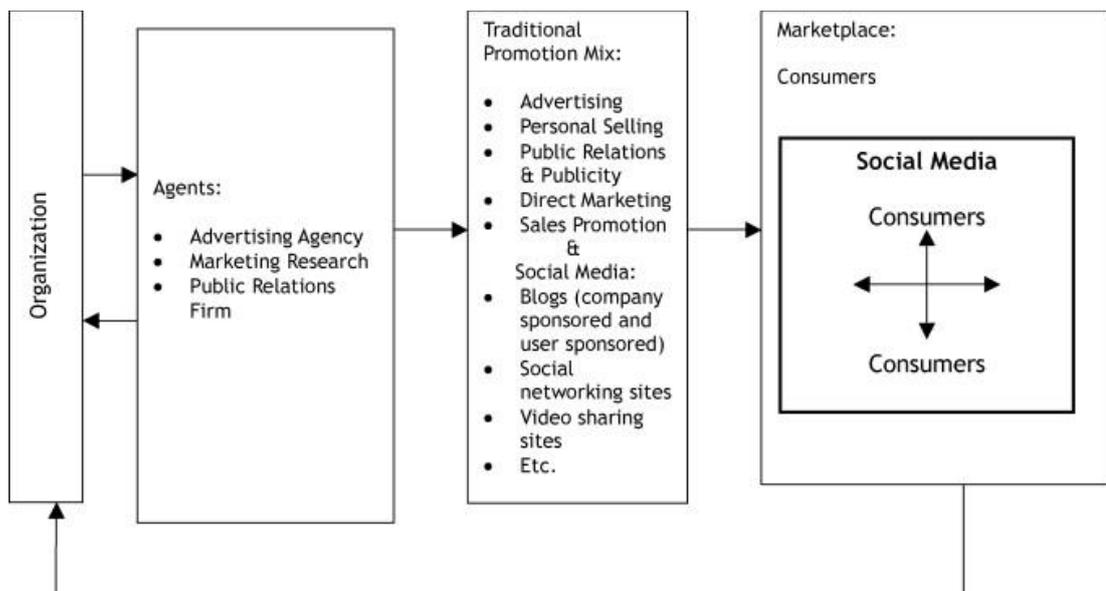
Figure 2: The New Communication Paradigm (Mangold and Faulds, 2009)

There are, however couple of distinctive features for social media marketing strategies for brands. The first one is to browse through social media platforms to find out which is the best platform to advertise their brand or product. The second is to determine the aim of the social media marketing strategies for brands. These aims could be listed as:

1. Delivering correct information directly from the brand
2. Increasing the sales
3. Introducing/Launching a product
4. Enhancing Brand Communities
5. Managing Reputation
6. Strengthening the Brand

Once the aims are determined by the brand the most appropriate platform or the tool should be adapted in order to maximize the effect of the marketing strategy and take advantage of the outcome of the social media.

2.5.1 The Advantages of Social Media Marketing

Social media is one of the most effective partners of the marketers as it provides easy, direct and cost effective solution to brands. In comparison with other promotion tools, social media provides a more easy-to-use and cost effective solutions. (Levinson, J.C& Gibson, S., 2010) The foremost aim of social media marketing is to engage in market research, idea and product innovation, customer services, public relations, reputation management and strengthening brand trust and brand loyalty among stakeholders. Stelzner (2014) reiterates that 92% of businesses perceive social media as an advantage. Whether it is a product or a service, social media integrates positive and negative comments of the both; thus increases engagement among brands and their followers.

94% of marketers, also confirm the advantages of social media by stating that they use social media for marketing purposes (Stelzner, 2017)

The fact that social media provides a faster communication is an extra advantage for marketers to impose faster strategies and offer faster solutions. One drawback of social media should however be kept in mind by social media marketers. Safe and trustworthy sources have recently been under scrutiny of consumers; it is thus crucial to convince consumers that the marketing platform or the tool will prioritize consumers' information safety on these platforms. In other words, safe sources are accepted and becomes trustworthy to the consumer more and brands should convince the consumer that their source is the correct one to get information from.

2.6 Viral and Online habits of Generation Y and Generation Z

Branding and marketing strategies cannot be separated from its target consumer. The main reason why Generation Y and Z will be discussed in this thesis is because the people who are born in the late 80's and early 90's still form the current students in HEI whereas Generation Z members are still studying in high schools and are prospective students of HEI.

Generation Y is often described as the generation who are born between 1981 and 1999. They are also known as the millennial *who want it all* and *who want it now*. It is claimed that Generation Y is a huge market, three times bigger than Generation X and a major force in sales. (Belleau & Summers et al., 2007) Generation Y is also seen as the trendsetter generation because of their consuming and spending habits (Martin&Bush, 2000)

Generation Z are born in the late nineties and early 2000's and are major *netizens*- a term put forth by Michael F. Hauben in the 1980's in order to describe interactive internet users who share opinions on the internet and actively follow technological developments regarding internet and its many platforms.

The aforementioned two generations' online habits are vital for marketers since they are fast consumers, they consume and make choices with their free will, they follow trends and are fully aware of what is offered to them. One of the characteristics of late Generation Y and Generation X is to be an *escapist generation* which allows them to escape from their responsibilities through computer games, internet, social networks and mobile phones. (Wood, 2013)

These features are golden market segment for marketers to pursue marketing activities. The major population of Generation X and Y that are present on social media is direct target for marketers. In conventional marketing, marketers usually make an effort to find customers but the convenience of social media and the habits of the generations above path a way for consumers to find the brand when they are online and vice versa.

2.7 Social Media Marketing in Higher Education Institutions

2.7.1 Students as Consumers

Every HEI is now following a market-driven policy in order to recruit students. They offer scholarships, give away laptops or even create campaigns in order to fit in the current aggressive marketing strategies of the brands. This competitive industry forced students to become consumers rather than followers as they are choosing a service to *buy*, by enrolling to a university for a better education. Better education means a better degree and a better degree means a better job; a life guaranteed product universities

offer to the youth. This selective process lead HEI to treat students as consumers so they can view the so called HEI product as the best one. Although the word customer is not easily accepted by the traditional education experts, one can see that students' satisfaction is one of the leading principles of HEI. Customer orientation is basically defined as putting customer satisfaction and interests first (Deshpande et al., 1993) and some research puts forward customer orientation as one of the most important elements of marketing. (Peters and Austin, 1985) Thus; service, satisfaction and customer orientation exist in every market whether it is a regular brand or a HEI brand with more cultural values.

2.7.2 Why Do We Need Social Media Marketing in Higher Education Institutions?

The target profile in social media marketing in HEI is the element that makes social media marketing successful in HEI student recruitment. Smedescu (2014) suggest two stakeholders of a HEI, the former one being students and the latter one being former members, faculty, staff, agencies and so forth. In his article the author affirms that:

> Current students want a quick response when they have questions, which helps them save time and enables communication in their favorite environment; to find out the latest news about everyday student activities; to have an easy way of knowing and maintaining relationships with fellow students; to feel they belong to a community and to show others the institution of higher education of which they are part of (Stageman, 2011).

Social Media marketing is therefore efficient in student retention to build a better communication bridge as well as building a constant and safe brand trust between the stakeholders. Constantinide & Stagno (2011) suggest that social media is not effective for students to make a decision in choosing an institution as they still rely on conventional marketing tools such as TV and fairs however this notion seems to be changing with the current improvements of social media. Students can now apply to

the universities through social media, ask questions, take part in competitions and campaigns and feel a part of the community. Stageman (2011) notes that social media is a preferred tool for students to spread the word, such as announcing the name of the institution they are enrolled in, finding friends in that community and so forth.

It is indeed correct that students tend to establish communication with the institution as a person. In Appendix 1 a screenshot can be seen of a Twitter interaction between a student and a social media account of Eastern Mediterranean University. The interaction shows a question asked by a student to two universities regarding which university was willing to enroll her and as soon as she received an answer from the university, she stated that her preference would be EMU due to the prompt response she received from the university whereas the other university showed no response to her.

Besides constant and continuous communication, a successful social media marketing means being present in every social media platform such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and even WhatsApp; considering users of each platform may vary from one country to another.

In the nutshell, successful social media marketing for a university means a successful customer orientation strategy, being present on various platforms and establishing a continuous communication with the stakeholders.

Chapter 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Communication and Persuasion Theory

The dominant theory that structures this thesis is Carl Hovland's (1952)

Communication and Persuasion theory. Hovland's theory is systematically designed

around three variables. These variables are:

a) The Communicator and its characteristics (The person conveying the message)

b) The Communication and its characteristics (What is the information that is

conveyed?/What is the content?)

c) The situation/The audience (What are the circumstances in which the message

is conveyed?/What are the characteristics of the receiver of the message?)

A much renowned theory and known as the Yale approach, Hovland's theory outlines

the persuasion process in communication. The process that is likely to lead to the

attitude change is attention, comprehension, acceptance and retention. Hovland's

findings after many years of research revealed that if the message arises positive

thoughts on the receiver of the message, it will be accepted and if the message is

rejected due to the belief that is deliberately formed and its manipulative (Walster &

Festinger, 1962). Fear, for example could be an element to persuade people to stop

from an act but *the reputation* of a source may lead to a positive or a negative effect

to people's response.

Persuasion theory has proven that communication may lead to the attitude change but several questions need to be asked on what specifically forms the attitude change during different communicative processes that may later on turn to behavior. Research on social media should be conducted through communication and media theories, sociology and psychology theories as social media usage heavily relies on individual and collective human behavior.

Together with Communication and Persuasion theory, the following theories of on human behavior in this chapter also are used as sub- theories to investigate how social media affects attitude and intention students' choice in HEI; how social media strengthens brand trust and brand loyalty and how it may form intention in HEI in two different studies. Following theories are chosen to interrogate social media behavior in HEI. One of those theories are meaning making theories of media and communication, one is a cognitive theory of media and three of them are sociological theories in order to illustrate how users derive and construct meanings from the technology social media offers as well as behavior types they form.

3.2 Symbolic Interactionism, Hyper-Symbolic Interactionism and Online Representation in Social Media

Social Media offers a tremendous liberty for human beings. Whether it is a success story, creating an idealized self through ideal images for the spectators, most platforms offer a world that is socially constructed by the user. Baran and Davis call the era we live in still as the meaning making perspective era. (2012, p. 40). In the meaning making theories, theorists like Herbert Blumer and George Herbert Mead emerged with symbolic interactionism. Mead focused on how social learning along with symbols and signs affect the learning process and claimed that all these learning

processes and meaning makings vary from one culture to another and from one learning process to other. These ideas were developed from pragmatism just like *The Chicago School* and Robert Park looked at how cities could create new cultures and how newspapers could have a big role interconnecting these communities, because it would transmit news. (2012, p. 320) Since meaning making theories usually base on active audience, a sociologist Alfred Schultz used phenomenology to look at how individuals were experiencing the social world. Schultz claimed that we have a social knowledge and we use that knowledge to structure our social world. (2012, p. 325)

In the current era, social media is clearly the strongest platform that enable the strongest communication that shape our expectations and the social world. Stanley Baran states that:

> People born after 1990 do use media much more often than those born earlier. Media have become an integral part of their daily lives. The average eight- to eighteen year-old uses media for seven and a half hours each day" (2012, p. 314)…Cell phones are the last thing they touch before falling asleep and the first thing they reach for upon waking. They spend the day accessing media using a variety of technologies that follow them everywhere they go" (2010, p. 2). Using this as a starting point, one can easily claim that the meaning making process has switched from socially constructed conversations to digital conversations. According to Baran Meaning Making theories " are focused on understanding the way media influence how we make sense of the social world and our place in it—how we make meaning. (2012, p.315)

Looking at social media from this perspective, the fact that it shapes our social world is an inevitable fact due to several reasons. These reasons are crucial in order to see why social media should now be included in meaning making paradigms. Social Media spreads symbols that construct an understanding of social reality and those symbols may actually create an ideal representation of the self in long terms. Along with this perspective, a Hyper-Symbolic Interactionism has been developed as a transformation

of Symbolic Interactionism for internet and social media. Lynch and McConatha (2006) define Hyper-Symbolic Interactionism as such:

> Hyper-symbolic interaction theory explains the creation of a new type of reality based on symbols found digitally. The theory comprises the smallest symbols such as the l's and O's of computer language and the tiny pixels of digital imagery, as well as the complex contemporary imagery of advertisements and commercials produced daily. The larger symbols and imagery that these details create lead to new values and norms different than other non-digital communities. This digital community is filled with marketers and advertisers, which in turn affect the reality humans' construct, including the norms and values we abide by, as well as the meaning we give to symbols. We socialize very differently in digital reality than we do in real life. Additionally, the increase in digital advertising causes us to perceive marketers and ads as reality.

Looking at social media and HEI from a hyper-symbolic interactionist perspective, one can easily see that students may change their profile photos to their university logo, a symbol that represents the message identified with the institution. The logo later on becomes a symbol of the persona of the student and an ideal representation of the self. The student with a Harvard Logo profile photo may convey a message of a top class and a qualified student whereas an active sharing of student club photos may construct a socially active student persona. Bearing these in mind, HEI are seeking ways to promote these symbols. They create frames with university logos for all stakeholders to share to also evoke the sense of belonging. Symbol Interactionism, symbols, meaning making process bear an important role in social media marketing as this cognitive and emotional process can easily be triggered to form an ideal self-representation on social media.

3.3 Social Identity Theory and Social Media

Social media has been in people's lives before Facebook, as people may not have realized in the past years. With the development of web 2.0 people started to access information and interact. In their article titled *Facebook: a literature review,* ed. (2013)

Caers R, de Feyter T, de Couck M, *et al.* study Facebook, one of the main platforms of social media and examine the relationship between individuals and Facebook.

The authors set off from research carried out on 289 people and state that wanting to join the 'ctitical mass' provides motivation for people to join social media platforms. Authors use information from Cheung and Lee (2010) to highlight the importance of social identity, wanting to be useful and feeling part of a group. Social identity and feeling as part of a group have pathed the way towards collective speaking and expression for individuals that question mainstream news, creating alternative viewpoints.

In a similar way, Christian Fuchs (2014) establishes a relationship between social theory and social media by pointing out how Web 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 enabled people to be a part of human cognition, human communication and human cooperation. For Fuchs, all the definitions in social theory, find a meaning in World Wide Web. Internet and platforms are social because they affect social behavior, social networking and cooperation by forming communities in various structures (2014, p. 45).

Social identity theory refers to identification as a perception of oneness with a group of persons (Ashforth & Mael, 1989a). People go beyond their personal identity or their sense of self and develop a social identity with the group. In the marketing context, consumers identify and associate themselves with brands that echo and strengthen their self-identities (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005; Ashforth & Mael, 1989b). Individuals have several identities which shapes how they define themselves or their self-conception. However, according to the identity theory these identities are arranged in a hierarchical order where noticeable identities are more influential on their

behaviors (D. B. Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003). There is an affective and a cognitive component to social identity (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). When members of the brand community in social media identify themselves with the group based on an assessment of how similar they are to the other members and how dissimilar they are to the nonmembers, this is considered a cognitive component of identification. The extent, to which identification is based on the emotional engagement with the group such as sharing the pride or sorrow, is considered the affective component (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005).

3.3.1 Social Identity Theory and Brand Communities

Brand community is a network of associations that connect the customers to a brand and via the brand, the products, services, the institution and the other customers (McAlexander et al., 2006). The concept of brand community is especially appropriate for universities since the university provides a wide range of services and products under its brand. In a study among university students in the USA the students reported that the use of social networking tools with the university brand makes them feel more connected to their university (CCCSE, 2009). The same study also revealed that the use of social media technology for academic purposes was related to the level of engagement of the students. The students find it more convenient to use social media technology to stay connected. For example, Eastern Mediterranean University uses social media technology including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Periscope in order to increase the engagement of the students with the university. Students often prefer to communicate their concerns or questions via Facebook Messenger since they have a perception that responses to e-mail queries are slower where shorter messages receive an almost instant response. In order to strengthen the university community, the university maintains a variety of branded Facebook pages in order to link the

faculty, current students, alumni, prospective students and others who wish to be kept in touch with the institution. Scott and Lane (2000) state that people do not need to be the members of the organization to feel identified. Therefore although, in using social media, university's foremost aim is to create a community identity with its members, it can do so with the non-members if the community identification is high on its social media accounts. In line with this theory, I propose the following hypotheses for my first study.

Hypothesis 1: Strength of the University Facebook community is related to the level of identification with the university community.

Hypothesis 2: Strength of the University Facebook community is related to the level of identification with the university brand.

3.3.2 Brand Identification and Brand Trust

Halbesleben and Wheeler (2009) argue that students may identify their relationship with the university using the metaphor of customers or as co-producers. The students as a customer metaphor has gained popularity as the universities attempted to become more student centered and more responsive to their needs in line with the teachings of the Total Quality Management movement. In the student as co-producer model, instead of regarding the students as customers whose needs and desires should be satisfied, the university's role is to provide them with the resources so they can produce the learning that is necessary along with the university staff and faculty. Halbesleben and Wheeler (2009) demonstrate that when students identify with the university as co-producers instead of customers, they were more satisfied and more likely to donate to the university after graduation. When the university uses the social media in an interactive way, this can enable the students to identify more with the university as co-

producers instead of merely as customers. The nature of the social media will allow the students not only to consume information, but also to have a role in which pieces of information are shared more widely and also to comment or post new information. This in turn will help them to identify themselves more as co-producers and thus feel more trust and loyalty to the university. When there is higher identification with the brand community, the customers are more supportive and they are more likely to make positive brand recommendations (Algesheimer et al., 2005). The reason that identification leads to positive brand recommendations may be because when individuals identify themselves with a well-regarded brand, they form positive attitudes toward the brand and the positive attitudes result in the behavior that is in line with the positive attitudes (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). In this case when a student identifies himself/herself with the university brand, they will develop higher levels of trust towards that brand. Another explanation for the identification and trust relationship is based on the information asymmetry where the customer is not in a position to fully understand the many details of what makes the product or service better in terms of quality, they rely on the brand to simplify their choice. In terms of higher education, the universities have an intangible and complex offering which requires a brand to help the stakeholders in their decision making processes regarding the university (Judson et al., 2008). The university brand needs to describe the university and represent the value that it provides using a clear and persuasive explanation to allow individuals to understand this value with the limited amount of information that they have (Judson et al., 2008). When used effectively, social media presence and the brand community of the university will aid the contacts and relationships between the various stakeholders of the university. In addition the information sharing and dissemination via social media will reduce the information

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asymmetry and decrease uncertainty and lead to greater predictability which results in higher brand trust (Laroche et al., 2013)

Hypothesis 3: Identification with the university community is related to the level of university brand trust.

Hypothesis 4: Identification with the university brand is related to the level of university brand trust

3.3.3 Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty

A major antecedent of loyalty is trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Aleman, 2001; Laroche et al., 2013). Previous research demonstrated that brand communities in social media enhance brand loyalty and trust mediates this relationship. In other words, the strength of the online brand community will enhance brand trust which in turn will lead to higher levels of loyalty (Laroche et al., 2013). A strong consumer brand will attract the targeted customer groups and correspondingly an effective university brand will enable the university to compete for the best students and faculty members, increase alumni loyalty and contributions, and improve community support (Judson et al., 2008). With the shift of emphasis in academic literature and practice towards relationship marketing, more attention has been directed towards understanding how trust serves as an antecedent of loyalty. Much of the research had focused on brand reputation and satisfaction leading to loyalty, however, the current discussion of trust views the brand as the consumer's partner in a long term relationship. It has been shown that trust leads to higher commitment especially when the customer involvement is high. The customer commitment towards the brand also brings higher price tolerance (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Aleman, 2001). Laroche, Habibi, Richard, and Sankaranarayanan

(2012) found that social media brand communities enhance the bond among the members and create a feeling of community which creates value for the members as well as for the company. They also show that social media brand communities lead to increased brand loyalty through the development of brand trust as a mediator.

Hypothesis 5: University brand trust is related to the level of university loyalty.

3.3.4 Citizenship Behaviors

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors were initially defined as the behavior of individuals that is not a formal job requirement and does not get rewarded by the formal reward system but in the aggregate facilitates organizational effectiveness (Bateman & Organ, 1983). However, this definition was criticized for focusing too much on the extra role nature of the behaviors. Organizational Citizenship Behaviors can be viewed on a continuum ranging from in-role behaviors such as respect for work and following the rules and procedures voluntarily to extra-role behaviors such as devoting more time and effort to tasks that will help the organization without any expectation of rewards (Vey & Campbell, 2004). In the marketing literature the concept of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors has been adapted to the Customer Citizenship Behavior (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007b). During the service encounter the customer plays an active role to such an extent that they have been called "partial employees" due to the significance of their participation in the service creation process (Bove, Pervan, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009). In these settings the quality of the experience also depends on the knowledge and skills of the participant. This participation is through in role and extra role behaviors. The behaviors that facilitate the effectiveness of the service delivery are called the in-role behaviors. Examples may be being on time for an appointment, providing accurate information and constructive feedback, and

fulfilling obligations. The behaviors that go beyond facilitating the effectiveness of the current service received such as voluntary behaviors to help the organization are labeled extra-role behaviors. These positive behaviors bay be directed towards the organization, the personnel or towards other customers. Examples may be giving thank you notes to the staff for excellent service, providing positive word of mouth about the organization and its service quality (Bove et al., 2009). In-role behaviors can be considered customer co-production behaviors. Especially in education the students can be viewed as co-producers instead of customers. Co-production behaviors are crucial in some settings for effective service delivery. Some of the research on co-production role of customers has involved the self-service stations in retail or use of ATM machines or online banking systems for financial institution customers. Much of the research focused on the issue of cost reduction by the use of co-production behaviors, however in educational institutions it goes beyond cost reduction. A further criticism of the existing studies is that most of the research on co-production behaviors has been theoretical, and lacked focus (Groth, 2005). Students are co-producers in the university. They need to be active participants in the learning process and they need to act as co-producers by conducting research, participating in groups, providing feedback and even contributing to the decision making in the university.

Hypothesis 6: University loyalty is related to the level of in role behaviors.

Hypothesis 7: University loyalty is related to the level of extra role behaviors.

3.4 Uses and Gratifications Theory and Social Media

The current era of technology was an interest to many researchers and this was when active audience theories and uses-and-gratifications theory emerged.

Uses and Gratifications theory can be identified as one of the late theories of communications and media theories. Developed by Herta Herzog the theory uses a cognitive approach to mainly look at why and how people use the media. The theory is also concerned about how and under what circumstances people use a media tool to form an opinion.

At this point the theory bears importance for this thesis as social media networking sites (SNS) are a powerful environment in which ideologies and opinions operate thus an opinion on a certain topic is more or less formed. Media images, operate an opinion on the audience to shape an ideology according to many critical theorists and in the same way social media implements the "perfect image", "perfect holiday", " perfect life" and sometimes "the perfect university".

SNS, specifically Facebook with over 2 billion users (2018) is a platform where these opinions are formed. Several researchers claimed that young people use Facebook to keep in touch with former friends from high school, maintain contact with current friends and developing social capital. (Ellison et al., 2007; Lampe et al., 2006).

After the launch of Facebook as an advertisement platform in 2010, things however changed both for businesses and users. Students still keep in touch with their social network but also form an opinion through the word-of-mouth which social media provides. This became a motivation to stay connected on Facebook since the main focus on Uses and Gratifications theory is "Gratifications sought" and "Gratifications Obtained". (Greenberg, 1974; Katz et al., 1973; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980) The theory suggests that if the user is gratified by the need or the motivation sought, they come back as a user in order to sustain this gratification. Elison et al.

(2007) found out that using facebook fulfilled this gratification to maintain social relationships and social capital. Omar et al (2014) made a further claim and suggested that a motivation sought on SNS is to seek information.

In a research conducted at Eastern Mediterranean University, Korhan and Ersoy (2015) thoroughly investigated the reasons of the usability and functionality of SNS along with demographic characteristics. Authors found out that students use Whatsapp, Facebook and Messenger as SNS to keep in touch with their network but also to *learn*: "SNS not only provide gratification to the university students in a positive way; they also contribute informally to their education… all the usability and functionality factors of SNS applications are significant for selection and provide gratification to the university students" (Korhan & Ersoy, 2015).

One can draw a conclusion that the need to learn and find information will be increasing in the coming years for the users since SNS are applying search engine feature to their system. Students thus learn news from their social network and other new sources, gratify their need with such information and select to be back due to this gratification. In this thesis however, Uses and Gratifications theory forms a theoretical background to investigate whether the use of social media to obtain information and the fact that students gratify this need and come back for this information, may lead to intention, thus persuasive behavior.

3.5 Attitude Theory and Social Media

Attitude theory by Richard Bagozzi (1992) affirms that there is a distinct sequence that begins with an appraisal process that result in an emotional reaction leading to the behavioral response. In Bagozzi's (1992) reformulation of the attitude theory, in the

first stage the individual evaluates or appraises the past, present and future outcomes (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). In other words, they make an evaluative judgment about an event or an incident that they are involved in or some object, person or entity that has personal meaning for them. The focus is the subjective interpretation not the objective event or the circumstance because different individuals may appraise the same outcome differently. Based on the appraisal, the next stage is the emotional reaction. Particular emotions result from the appraisal. For example, an individual may be pleased with the performance of a product or the experience of a service or conversely may get angry due to a promise that is not kept. A fan may feel pride in their team's achievement. In the same way, the members of the Facebook community for the university will appraise the emotional and rational benefits that they receive from being associated with the community and the university. This assessment will result in an emotional reaction which will determine to what extent the user will identify with the university community and the university brand. This will also influence the feelings of trust. The loyalty as well as in-role and extra-role behaviors will result from this emotional or affective response.

Figure 3: Attitude Theory Model by Richard Bagozzi (1992)

3.6 Social Exchange Theory and Social Media

In this research the proposed model is also supported by the social exchange relationship between the university and the stakeholders. According to the Social Exchange Theory people seek to reciprocate the positive benefits that they perceive to receive (Bateman & Organ, 1983). The theory argues that the individual will feel obliged to give back when they receive. Bateman & Organ (1983) have used this theoretical argument to develop the concept of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) and argued that as job satisfaction of employees increase, they reciprocate by demonstrating more "citizenship behaviors" such as altruistic, helping, and compliance even when there is no direct supervision. The exchanges are not just on an economic basis, but the social exchange refers to the building of lasting relationships over time instead of focusing on quick transactions which maintain the balance. The individuals may reciprocate through citizenship behaviors such as going out of their way to help others, providing positive word of mouth or performing additional tasks without the expectation of direct rewards. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2007) extend the concept of "citizenship behaviors" to include customers. When customers feel that the organization is providing care and attention to their needs, they will reciprocate by voluntarily providing support for the organization.

Furthermore, customers who receive social emotional support and instrumental support from other customers will feel obliged to help out other customers without in response. This voluntary support is not just directed to the specific customers who provided help but will include others.

3.7 Planned Behavior Theory and Social Media

Developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991, Theory of Planned Behavior is designed to explain human behavior and beliefs. According to this theory human behavior is formed by perceived behavior control, subjective norms which results in intention and behavior.

Main argument in this theory is the intention of an individual that would adapt into a certain behavior. In order for the intention to occur, certain opportunities and resources such as money, time, cooperation and proficiency should be present. (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2002; Ajzen, 2008). These elements are also a control mechanism on human behavior, however, as soon as the abovementioned parameters are formed , it results in behavior. (Fishbein, 1979; Raz, 2010)

Planned Behavior Theory determines three independent factors on human behavior and it is commonly used to reflect the relationship between beliefs, intention and behavior. These main factors are determined by sub factors which are Behavioral Beliefs, Normative Beliefs and Control Beliefs. Behavioral Beliefs are mainly the people's evaluation towards a specific belief or an experience. Normative belief is the individual's belief that is effected by the people who are important to them. A control belief however is based on the factors that may facilitate or prevent behavior. These three factors lead to three independent factors that may result in intention and behavior.

The first is the attitude- a process to undergo negative or positive thoughts. The second is the subjective norm – a process that is concerned with the social pressure around an individual that would shape the behavior. The final and the third one is the perceived behavioral control which focuses on the conditions and the adaptation process of an individual. If the subjective norm and attitude is positive perceived behavioral control

increases which would result in behavior. According to this theory, adapting a behavior is a process that links perceived behavioral control with intention. (Armitage & Conner, 2001)
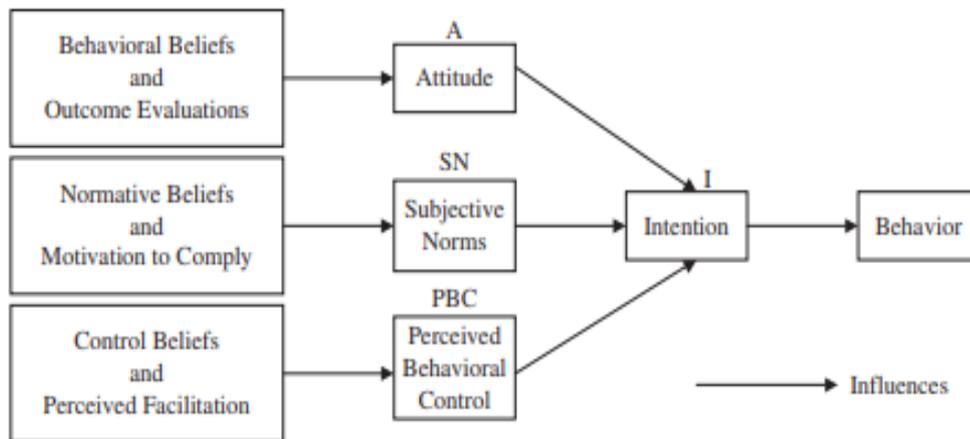
Figure 4: Theory of Planned Behavior as shown in Presley et al. (2010)

Presley *et al* in their research "A study of Business Student Choice to Study Abroad: A Test of the Theory of Planned Behavior" applies Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior to analyze the factors that influence attitudes of Business students in the United Stated towards their choice to study abroad. Authors reached a consistent result with the proposed Theory of Planned Behavior and concluded that "the three variables-attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control- each amplified the prediction of student intention to study abroad". The findings of the research also led to some recommendations as to how important is targeting promotional materials according to students' "decision making" as well as towards parents because they are also involved in the decision making process. The model also provided evidence that students value the opinion of the others or as Presley puts forward "opinion of approval or disapproval from respected referent groups when making a decision of this magnitude"

Lately social media and the perceived image obtained on social media is highly linked to shaping consumer behavior and social media positively effects peer communication over products. (Wang et al., 2012). In my second study, I aim to investigate whether social media along with three main factors of Theory of Planned Behavior influence high school students in making a university choice they see on social media.

Hypothesis 1 (Main Hypothesis): Intention of students to attend a university based on what they see on social media is related to their attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control about social media.

Hypothesis 1a: Intention of students to attend a university based on what they see on social media is related to their attitudes.

Hypothesis 1b: Intention of students to attend a university based on what they see on social media is related to their subjective norms

Hypothesis 1c: Intention of students to attend a university based on what they see on social media is related to their perceived behavioral control about social media.

Hypothesis 2: Student attitudes about social media is related to their behavioral beliefs and their evaluation of its outcomes.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived behavioral control of students about social media is related to their control beliefs and perceived facilitation.

Hypothesis 4: Subjective norms of students about social media is related to their normative beliefs and their motivation to comply.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Method for Study 1

This thesis is designed around two different studies. The first study analyzes whether social media strengthens brand trust and brand loyalty of current students in Eastern Mediterranean University. The second study sought to extend study one by including high school students to further measure how social media affects their intention to attend a university.

Quantitative method was chosen in order to study two different data derived from two different studies. The users of social media are wide range of groups therefore numerical data to explain empirical statements were preferred. Cohen and Manilon (1980) define empirical statements to be the case in the "real world" rather than what must be the case. Sukamolson (2007) reiterates that quantitative research measures social reality and now that social media is highly involved in the social reality with many users pathed a way for the researcher to use this method.

4.1.1 Sample and Measures

The research sample was chosen from the users of the Facebook page of Eastern Mediterranean University located in North Cyprus. The university has a large number of international students and uses social media in as part of their integrated marketing strategy. The number of students in North Cyprus, which become a significant destination for international students over the last decade, rose from 40,000 to more

than 70,000 in 10 years. Only 15% of these are local students from North Cyprus, thus a very large majority of the university students are international. Considering that the total population in North Cyprus is 286,000 (as of 2011), this shows the significance of the university students to all aspects of life in the country. With such a diverse student body and alumni who live and work in many different countries around the world, an effective method of establishing and maintaining identification with and loyalty to the university is needed.

Facebook has 2 billion monthly active users with nearly 83% of Facebook's daily active users outside of US and Canada. Internet usage in North America and Europe is 89% and 73.9% of the population respectively. In Africa and the Middle East, the internet usage is lower with 28.6% and 53.7% respectively, however the growth over the 2000-2016 has been very impressive with 7415% and 3.936.5% for Africa and the Middle East while the growth was 191.1% and 485.2% for North America and Europe during the same period (Facebook users in the world, 2016). Facebook monthly active users in USA and Canada is 222 million, in Europe is 333 million, in Asia Pacific 566 million and in the rest of the world 533 in 2016 (Facebook Investor Relations - Quarterly Earnings Report, 2016). Among the 18-29, 30-49, 50-64 and 65 age groups the use of Facebook is 89%, 82%, 65% and 49% based on US data according to Pew Research Center. (Pew Research Center, 2016). This demonstrates the importance of using Facebook effectively for reaching potential international students. Thus it was intended to measure how the strength of the Facebook community of the university is associated with the students' and potential students' identification with the university community which in turn is related to the current students' identification with the university brand. It is expected that identification will be related to improved

university brand trust and loyalty which will result in organizational citizenship behaviors of the students and potential students. Thus target sample was users of the university Facebook page and the data were collected using an online survey posted on the university official Facebook page.

In studies of online behavior or phenomena that take place exclusively on the Internet, online panels may be "not only acceptable but ideal" (Landers & Behrend, 2015, p. 19). As suggested, the prior theories were checked and the constructs that were used to evaluate whether the sample used was appropriate. Landers and Behrend (2015) state that in convenience samples since representativeness cannot be demonstrated by equal probability of each case in the population being in the selected sample, rational arguments need to be made about the similarity of the convenient population that was sampled to the intended population so that statistical conclusions can be used do draw theoretical conclusions about the intended population. The sampling strategy was to use a convenience sampling to target the current users of the Facebook page of the university since they would be in a position to comment on their familiarity with the university and its Facebook community. The sample was the users of the Facebook page. And the intended population is also the users of the social media pages and groups affiliated with higher education institutions. Therefore, the intended population and the convenient population are aligned.

Based on a priori power analysis, 200 useable surveys were targeted. Out of the total 146,000 users that have "liked" the page there were 225 responses. 19 surveys were eliminated for missing data (The cases that had more than 5% of the questions missing were removed), surveys that were filled out in an unrealistic amount of time (the time stamp for the beginning and the end of the survey was checked), surveys that had

checked the same response for all questions. Of the 206 useable responses, 150 (72.8%) were male while 56 (27.2%) were female. With regards to age, the majority of the respondents (77 respondents, 43.5%) were 21e25 years old. 65 respondents (36.7%) were under 21, followed by 24 (13.6%) who were between 36 and 30.4 (4.5%) were between ages 31e35 and lastly 8 (4.5) were over 35 years old. Large portion of the respondents (79 respondents, 39.9%) reported to have been using the university Facebook page for 1-2 years, 66 (33.3%) had been members of the page for 2 years or above, and 53 (26.8%) for less than one year. 28 (14.1%) were postgraduate students and 170 (85.9%) were undergraduate students. Finally, 90 have a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) lower than 2.5, 82 have a CGPA between 2.5 and 3.5 and 34 have a CGPA higher than 3.5. In terms of the home country of the respondents, 44 were from Turkey, 16 from Cyprus, 12 from Nigeria, 8 from Iraq, 7 from Jordan, 6 from Zimbabwe and the remaining were from other countries. The distribution of the respondents was in line with the population of students currently studying in the university. To develop the measures, the theoretical and empirical literature was investigated and existing measurement scales were found that have been validated by previous studies. Some changes were made to the scales in order to make them appropriate for our study context.

The Strength of the University Community on Facebook measures the degree to which members of the university Facebook page feel connected to one another, share information and their experiences, and how useful they perceive these exchanges to be. Three items were adopted from (Ho, 2015; Laroche et al., 2013) developed by Srinivasan, Anderson, and Ponnavolu (2002). Cronbach alpha reported in the literature ranged from 0.66 (Laroche et al., 2013) to 0.77 (Ho, 2015). The Student Identification

with the university community measures how much the participants identified themselves with the rest of the university community. Sample items such as "when the university is planning an event, I consider it something "we" are doing rather than something "they" are doing." targeted to assess the salience of their association with the university with regard to their self-concept. Total of three items were adapted from previous studies (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Ho, 2015) and had Cronbach alpha values reported in the literature ranged from 0.80 to 0.94. Student identification with the university brand was made up of three items adapted from Ho (2015). Items such as "when someone criticizes the university, it feels like a personal insult" were used to measure the level of association with the university brand in general (instead of focusing on the community in particular). Our brand trust and brand loyalty items were adapted from the scale used by Laroche et al. (2013) and had been developed by Srinivasan et al. (2002). There were three items measuring brand trust such as "The academic quality of the university never disappoints me" and three items measuring brand loyalty such as "If there was a lower tuition fee alternative in another university, I would still be in this university." The citizenship behaviors were measured using two scales with three items each.

In role behavior has been used in the literature to show the extent to which the consumer contributes to the effectiveness of the service they receive by providing information or by adhering to the established procedures. In this study, the scale used by Ho (2015) was modified to be suitable for university students using items such as "I fully utilize the opportunities provided by this university with my hard work". Extra-role behavior has been used in the literature to show the extent to which customers are willing to go out of their way to provide positive word of mouth for the organization.

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Sample items are "I will recommend this university to others". More detailed scale information is provided in Table 1.

4.2 Research Method for Study 2

4.2.1 Sample and Measures

As the results from the previous study indicated a significant correlation between brand identification, brand trust, brand loyalty and social media among *current* students of Eastern Mediterranean University, the researcher has decided to do a further research on high school, in other words, *prospective* students with a view to investigate whether social media has an effect on the intention and the university choice.

This study was conducted in random high schools in North Cyprus with the permission and approval of Ministry of Education and Culture, Approval of High School Principals and under the supervision of Psychological Counseling and Guidance teachers. 257 students participated in the study. 20 surveys and participants with more than +3/-3 z-score were excluded as outliers therefore the research was carried out with 237 usable responses. 106 (44.7%) of the participants were male and 131 (55.3%) were female students. The age range of the participants were between 16-18 (m=16.97) sd=0.62.

The study was based on the measurement scales from a validated previous study by Presley et al. (2010). Some changes were made to the items in order to make it appropriate for the Turkish Cypriot high school students. The survey was translated to Turkish by the researcher and was confirmed by Prof. Dr. Cem Tanova (co-supervisor of the research) and Şerife Özyahyalar (Eastern Mediterranean University official translator). Some measurement items such as " I intend to go to this university", " I

plan to go to this university" and " I will make an effort to go to this university" was used to measure intention.

The study SPSSv20 was used for hypotheses testing and data analysis. For the scale, assumptions of homogeneity of variance and normality were completed. Based on the date on SPSS, correlation and regression analyses were carried out. In order to see the associations among variables correlation coefficients were also measured.

Chapter 5

DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Data Analysis for Study 1

In this study Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Analysis of Moment (AMOS) version 19.0 software (Arbuckle, 2009) was used for hypotheses testing and data analysis. This method allows us to simultaneously demonstrate both direct and indirect effects of independent variables on dependent variables. Since maximum likelihood (ML) estimation, which assumes multivariate normal data, for normality of all latent variables were checked using visual analysis of the frequency distribution histogram with the normal curve as well as inspecting the skewness and kurtosis values. Multicollinearity was not a concern for study variables since tolerance values which were calculated from ordinary least squares estimates were above the threshold of 0.10 (Kline, 2015). Several fit indices were used to evaluate fit of the model.

Several fit indices were used to evaluate fit of the model. The chi-square is expected to be insignificant however due to sample size influence, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is often used which is recommended to be lower than 3 or 5 according to different researchers (Arbuckle, 2009; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Incremental fit indices such as the comparative fit index (CFI), the incremental fit index (IFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were also used considering the problems associated with the reliance on chi-square in larger samples. The generally agreed-on critical value for the CFI and IFI is .90 or higher (Kline,

2015). RMSEA should be less than .08, Normed Fit Index should be less than .90 (Arbuckle, 2009; Hair et al., 2010).

In the reporting of the results the two step approach was used that is commonly used with SEM analysis. The focus was on the reliability and the validity of the measurement items to prove that they are representing the constructs that we have in the model. Subsequently, the focus was on the structural model to see how well the hypothesized relationships are supported by the data.

5.2 Results

5.2.1 Measurement Model

In line with previous studies using SEM prior to model testing, I established the reliability and the convergent validity as well as discriminant validity of the measures we used. **Table 1** and **Figure 4** provide information on the reliability and convergent validity. Cronbach alpha values are shown to assess reliability. Composite reliability (CR), factor loadings, and average variance extracted (AVE) are provided to assess convergent validity. The Cronbach alpha values for the constructs are above the threshold value of .70 (Nunnally, 1978). The CR values ranged from .78 to .93 and AVE ranged from .55 to .82 which were above .70 and .50 respectively which are the critical values recommended (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Based on the data, the modification indices available through AMOS suggested a linkage between the two observed variables as shown in **Figure 4**.

The chi-square of our final model was 335.705, degrees of freedom 167 chi-square/df was 2.01 with probability level p=.0001. The CFI and IFI were .94 and RMSEA was .07. All these values suggested that the measurement model fitted the data set well.

Table 1: Measurement model evaluation results

Construct	Measurement Items	Loading	A	CR	AVE
Strength of the University Community on Facebook	Share a common bond with other followers	.91	.84	.85	.66
	Are strongly affiliated with other members	.81			
	The followers benefit from this community	.71			
Student Identification with the University Community	I see myself as a part of the university community	.85	.88	.88	.72
	When the university is planning an event, I consider it something "we" are doing rather than something "they" are doing.	.81			
	I am very attached to this community	.88			
Student Identification with the University Brand	When someone compliments the university, it feels like a personal compliment	.93	.86	.87	.69
	When someone criticizes the university, it feels like a personal insult	.89			
	I am very interested in what others think about this university	.64			
University Brand Trust	Education that my university provides fulfills my expectations	.91	.93	.93	.82
	I rely on the quality of education at the university	.95			
	The academic quality of the university never disappoints me	.87			
University Brand Loyalty	I consider myself to be loyal to the university	.97	.89	.87	.69
	If there was a lower tuition fee alternative in another university, I would still be in this university	.76			
	I am willing to pay more for a degree from this university as opposed to a degree from others	.73			
Extra Role Behavior	I will recommend this university to others	.81	.78	.78	.55
	I will tell my friends about the good experience in this university	.66			
	I try to join and contribute to the activities held by the university	.73			
In Role Behavior	I fully utilize the opportunities provided by the university with my hard work	.81	.86	.87	.68

| I may continue my further studies in this university | .66 |
| Even if I had difficulties in my courses, I would not consider leaving this university | .73 |

Note: Loading= Factor loading, α = Cronbach's Alpha, C.R. = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted
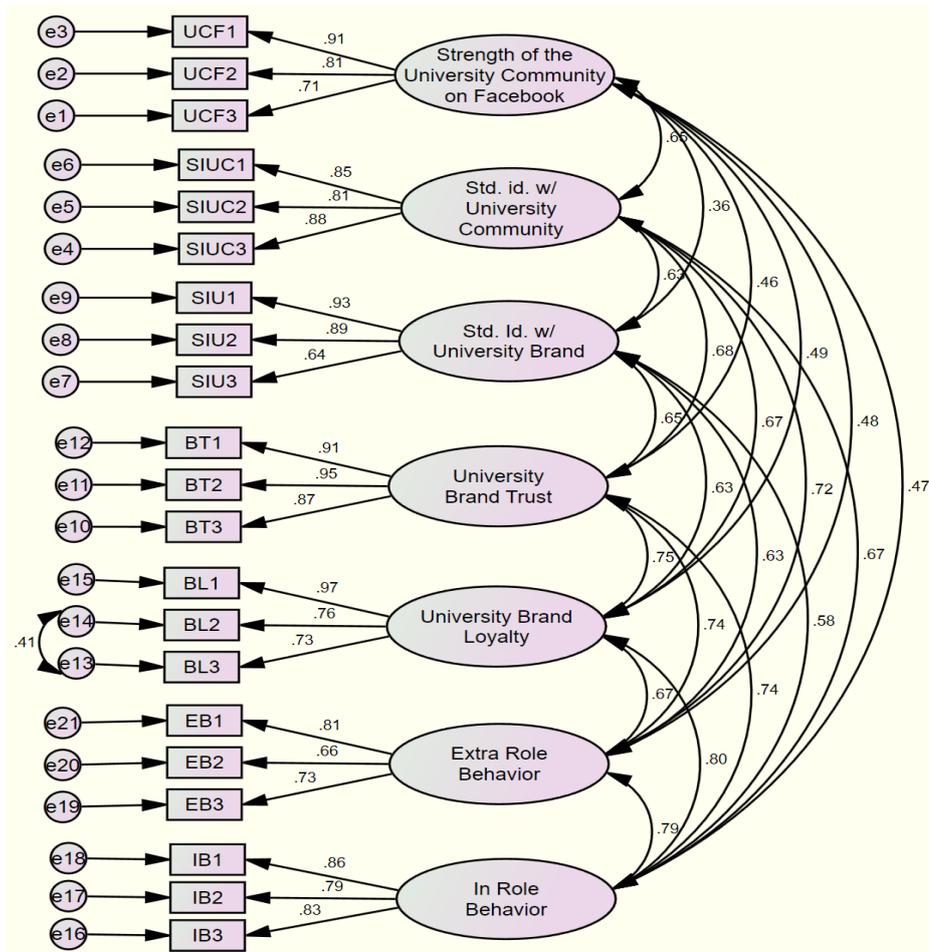
Figure 5: Confirmatory Factor Model

Discriminant validity requires that the indicators should correlate weakly with the constructs other than the construct it belongs to. To assess discriminant validity, we examined the indicators' cross loadings to see if indicators had higher loadings on their own construct rather than other constructs. Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion was also used, to see if each construct's AVE is higher than its correlation with all of the

other constructs. **Table 2** shows that square roots of AVEs are greater than the correlations between any two constructs. The results indicate clearly that the constructs display discriminant validity.

Since the data collection relied on participants responding to the items it was necessary to check for single source bias or common method variance influence on the relationships in the SEM model. Harman's single-factor test was used to check for common method bias by loading all the indicators or items in our study into an exploratory factor analysis (Sharma, Crawford, & Yetton, 2009). Common method bias was ruled out since a general single factor did not account for the majority of covariance among the measurement indicators (scale items).

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, square root of AVE and Correlations between constructs

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Strength of Univ. Facebook Community	2.33	0.81	**.813**						
2. Identify with Community	3.23	1.08	.646	**.847**					
3. Identify with Univ. Brand	2.15	0.77	.357	.627	**.829**				
4. Univ. Brand Trust	2.88	1.07	.463	.680	.650	**.908**			
5. Univ. Brand Loyalty	2.68	0.91	.485	.673	.633	.746	**.828**		
6. In Role	3.15	1.09	.477	.715	.629	.743	.666	**.737**	
7. Extra Role	2.34	0.72	.469	.665	.581	.741	.800	.785	**.826**

Note: Square roots of AVE are provided in the diagonal. (n=206)

5.2.2 Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated after the assessment of the constructs with the measurement model. Structural equation modeling with AMOS was used to determine

the relationship of the constructs in our proposed model based on maximum likelihood estimation method. The chi-square of our structural model was 425.059, degrees of freedom 179 chi-square/df was 2.38 with probability level $p<.0001$. The CFI and IFI were .92 and RMSEA was .08. These values indicate adequate fit of the data with our proposed theoretical model.

Figure 5 shows the result of the structural model with the path coefficients and the R square values in bold italics indicating to what extent the variance in the dependent variable was explained by the independent variables. Loyalty explained 73% of the variance in in-role behaviors and 61% of the variance in Extra-role behavior of the participants in our study. The model of explains 73% of the variance in Loyalty. Identification with the university community and the university brand explain 55% of the variation in Trust. And the perceived strength of the Facebook community explains 43% and 40% of the variation in student identification with the university community and university brand respectively.
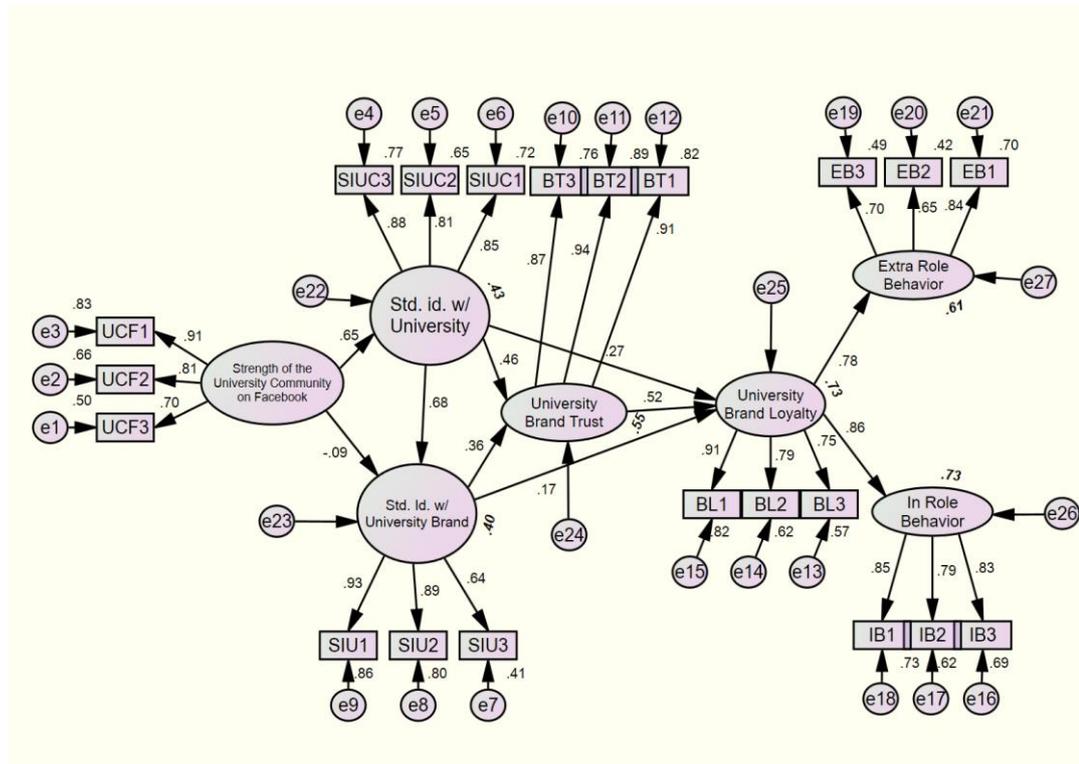
Figure 6: Structural Model Analysis

Table 3 provides the standardized estimates, standard errors and the significance levels. Hypotheses 1 and 2 argued that the perceived strength of the university Facebook community will enhance the identification with the university community and identification with the university brand. The path coefficients were β=.653, p<.001 and β=-.087, p=.353, not significant supporting H1 but not H2.

Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4 expected that trust is related to the level of identification with the University community and the university brand. Our results show β = .457, p < .001 and β =.363, p <.001 respectively. Hypothesis 5 stated that trust and loyalty are related and the results show the path coefficient as β =.519, p<.001. Hypothesis 6 and Hypothesis 7 state that variations in loyalty is related to variations in role and extra role behaviors. This was supported with β =.855, p <.001 for in role and β =.783, p<.001 for extra role behaviors.

Whether the relationship between perceived strength of the Facebook community (UFC) and student identification with the university brand (SIU) is mediated by the student identification with the university community (SIUC) was also investigated. The direct effect of perceived strength of the Facebook community (independent variable) on student identification with the university brand (dependent variable) is β =-.087, p=.353, ns, however the indirect effect through student identification with the university community (mediator) is β =.421, p<.001. The indirect effect through student identification with the university community (SIUC) is between .279 and .636 with 95% bias corrected percentile method using bootstrapping method with 2000 resamples (β =.421, SE=.108; p<.001).

This means that student identification with the university community mediates the relationship between Facebook community and brand identification. In other words, we can argue that the reason that Facebook community is associated with brand identification is due to the increased university community identification. We can recommend that universities should strive to enhance community identification.

The role of trust as a mediator was also investigated. I checked to see if student identification with the university community and the loyalty relationship is mediated by trust. It can be seen that the direct effect between student identification with the university community and loyalty is β=.265, p<.001, and the indirect effect that goes from student identification with the university community and mediated by trust is between .134 and .295 with 95% bias corrected percentile method using bootstrapping method with 2000 resamples (β=.196, SE=.046; p<.001). This indicates that there is mediation. We also checked whether student identification with the university brand and loyalty relationship is mediated by trust. The results show a direct relationship

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between identification with brand and loyalty is $\beta=.171$; $p<.015$. The mediated indirect path is between .123 and .362 with 95% bias corrected percentile method using bootstrapping method with 2000 resamples ($\beta=.219$, SE=.071; $p<.001$). The results indicate that the reason that identification with university community and university brand results in higher loyalty is due to the increased trust.

Table 3: Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis		Std. Est.	S.E.	C.R.	p	Result
H1	Strength of Univ. Facebook Community -> Identify with Community	.653	.109	7.955	.001	Supported
H2	Strength of Univ. Facebook Community -> Identify with Univ. Brand	-.087	.088	-0.929	.353	Not supported
H3	Identify with Community -> Trust	.457	.076	5.831	.001	Supported
H4	Identify with Univ. Brand -> Trust	.363	.111	4.47	.001	Supported
H5	Univ. Brand Trust -> Univ. Brand Loyalty	.519	.07	6.383	.001	Supported
H6	Loyalty -> In Role	.855	.099	10.553	.001	Supported
H7	Loyalty -> Extra Role	.783	.08	8.16	.001	Supported

Note: Std. Est.=Standardized estimate, S.E.=Standard Error, C.R.=Critical Ratio

5.3 Data Analysis for Study 2

5.3.1 Correlational Analyses

The Cronbach Alpha for the values of the study is 0.85 and in order to see the associations among variables a correlation analysis was conducted in the study. Correlation coefficients of variables are present in Table 2. The correlational coefficients revealed that Attitude was significantly correlated with Outcome Evaluation ($r=0.43$, $p<0.05$) and Behavioral Belief ($r=0.32$, $p<0.05$); Subjective Norm was significantly correlated with Normative Beliefs ($r=0.53$, $p<0.05$) and Motivation to Comply ($r=0.27$, $p<0.05$); Perceived Behavioral Control was significantly correlated with Control Beliefs ($r=0.57$, $p<0.05$); and finally Intention was significantly correlated with Perceived Behavioral Control ($r=-0.16$, $p<0.05$).

Table 4: Correlation Analyses

1. Intention	-	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. Outcome Evaluation	,117	-							
3. Attitude	,028	,434**	-						
4. Subjective Norm	,060	,366**	,312**	-					
5. Normative Belief	,080	,354**	,348**	,530**	-				
6. Motivation to Comply	,107	,190**	,127*	,266**	,203**	-			
7. Perceived Behavioral Control	,156*	,428**	,469**	,386**	,392**	,233**	-		
8. Control Belief	,103	,429**	,476**	,370**	,382**	,253**	,570**	-	
9. Behavioral Belief	,014	,320**	,366**	,288**	,372**	,064	,252**	,314**	-

Note: **$p<0.05$

5.3.2 Regression Analyses

In the second study, four regression analyses were conducted to test the model that tries to find the connection between students' social media use and their intention to choose a university.

The first regression analysis tried to predict students' Attitude as dependent variable. The results revealed 25% of the variance and indicated that the model was significantly predicted Attitude F (2, 240) =39,13, p= ,000. Behavioral Beliefs (BB) (β = .25, p<0.005) and Outcome Evaluation (OE) (β = .35, p<0.005) scores as independent variables were significant predictors of Attitude. Hypothesis 2 suggested that students attitudes about social media are related to their behavioral beliefs and their evaluation of its outcomes and the results supported H2.

Perceived Behavioral Control was tested to see if it was predictable with Control Belief scores. Regression analysis explained 33% of the variance and showed that Control Belief (β = .57, p<0.005) was able to predict Perceived Behavioral Control F (1, 241) = 116,09, p= ,000. Hypothesis 3stated that perceived behavioral control of students about social media is related to their normative beliefs and perceived facilitation which was supported by the results.

The third regression analysis tested Subjective Norm as dependent variable. Normative Belief (β = .17, p<0.005) and Motivation to Comply (β = .50, p<0.005) variables explained 31% of the variance and significantly predicted Subjective Norm scores F (2, 241) = 53,28, p= ,000. Hypothesis 4 argued that subjective norms of students about social media is related to their normative beliefs and their motivation to comply which was supported by the results.

Three regression analyses were conducted and the results were parallel to the previous study's findings. Since the results were met with previous study for the second stage of the model, analysis moved forward to third stage which states that Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Attitude would significantly predict students' Intention to go to a university. The regression analysis predicted only 3% of the variance and results showed that this structure was not able to predict Intention F (3, 233) = 2,16, p>0,05. Attitude scores (H1a) (β = .02, p>0.05) and Subjective Norm (H1b) (β = -,01, p>0.05)   couldn't predict Intention scores. However, Perceived Behavioral Control (H1c) was a significant predictor for Intention (β = .18, p<0.05). Detailed information on regression analysis is present in Table 3. Thus, Hypothesis 1a and 1 b were not supported but Hypothesis 1c were supported by the results.

According to the revealed scores, it can be seen that only Perceived Behavioral Control as a factor plays a significant role in intention to choose a university

Table 5: Social media and Intention Regression Analysis

Variables	R²	ΔR²	*B*	*SEb*	β
Attitude	.246	.246			
Behavioral Belief			,38	,06	,35**
Outcome Evaluation			,20	,05	,25**
Perceived Behavioral Control	.325	.325			
Control Belief			,53	,05	,57**
Subjective Norm	.307	.307			
Motivation to Comply			,12	,04	,16**
Normative Belief			,38	,04	,50**
Intention	.027	.027			
Attitude			-,09	,12	-.06
Subjective Norm			-,02	,12	,01
Perceived Behavioral Control			,31	,13	,18*

Note: *p<0.05

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION

6.1 Discussion

The first study has sought to test how the perceived strength of the Facebook community of a university by the users is related to the users' identification with the university community and the university brand. The role of identification with the university community and the brand on increasing brand trust and loyalty was also examined. Finally, the impact of loyalty on in role and extra role behaviors such as being an active part of the learning process in the university and acting as an advocate for the university was explored.

The results reveal that the perceived strength of the Facebook community of the university has a relationship with the student identification with the university community which in turn is linked to student identification with the university brand. A full mediating effect of student identification were found with the university community on the relationship between the perceived strength of the university Facebook community and student identification with the university brand. In other words, the reason that the strong Facebook community can result in strong identification with the brand is because of the role of identification with the university community. Universities need to enhance the identification with the university community. One way is through a stronger social media presence, but universities should also consider other tools that will strengthen the engagement of the student in

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the university community. The universities should focus more on developing interactive experiences on social media and should not use it only to deliver information. On social media, even on the branded pages of the university, the universities don't own the conversation anymore (Lipka, 2009, p. 3). There are examples when trying to control the conversation by removing contents from its Facebook page back fired and ended up with student protests (Alkhas, 2011).

The mediating role of trust between identification and loyalty show that the at least part of the reason that students who have higher identification with the university have higher loyalty is due to the higher level of trust that they develop. This means that universities need to find ways to increase levels of trust. One way as this study demonstrates is by increasing the identification with the community and with the brand. Universities need to also seek additional ways of increasing this level of trust through other mechanisms such as being truthful in their promises and outcomes that they are able to deliver.

Universities may have a large number of departmental or unit pages that university members follow in addition to the official Facebook page. For instance, the International Center Facebook page of the university would be a more specific target page for international students, as there is a present community on the page with same shared intentions and queries. A stronger presence in social media will strengthen the identification with the community and the university brand. Competitions that can integrate social media such as making short promotional films for the university which may be published on the official page and can receive a symbolic reward may lead to more interaction and activity. These kinds of activities will enable the student to identify act as a co-producer and also develop themselves in the process. The

university where our study was carried out had conducted a campaign in which graduates sent their photos illustrating student life as they experienced it in the university to the Facebook page of the university. The person who submitted the most liked photo that displayed student life won a round trip flight ticket to visit the university.

The second study intended to measure the effect of Facebook presence of universities on high school students' intention on university choice. The results revealed that the relationship between students' intention to choose a university they see on social media and their intention to attend that university is not significant. However the relationship between perceived behavioral control and their intention to attend a university based on social media is significant. One possible explanation for this could be the fact that students use social media as a firsthand information gathering tool and they perceive that information useful, however they do not necessarily attend to that university.

Since Perceived Behavioral Control was a significant predictor for intention, it can be argued that Facebook presence of Higher Education Institutions play a significant role in intention to choose a university. Items that tested PBC included 5 point likert scale questions such as "For me, using Facebook to get information about universities is extremely convenient/inconvenient"," I am confident that the information I will find on Facebook is accurate", " All the relevant universities that I might be interested in have a presence on Facebook" . The results for these questions illustrate that students perceive Facebook presence useful for Higher Education Institutions they intend to attend.

Previous studies on Planned Behavior Theory investigated intention on many terms. Pineda (2009) explored the intention of students taking a business course and found out that if they feel that they will be successful and able to perform in the course, they are more likely to take the course. Cohen and Hanno (1993) applied TPB to students in order to test whether attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavior control influenced their intention to choose a major in business schools and found out that all these factors lead to intention with high correlations.

In another study, Ingram, Cope, Harju and Wuench (2000) studied TPB with graduate students in order to see how much would they apply or not apply to graduate schools and also found out a significant correlation between three aforementioned variables and intention to apply to graduate school.

This study aimed to find out whether the structural model of Presley at al. Theory of Planned Behavior was applicable to high school students in North Cyprus. The results revealed that there is a significant correlation between sub factors. In other words, there is a correlation between Behavioral Beliefs, Outcome Evaluations and Attitude, a correlation between Normative Beliefs, Motivation to Comply and Subjective Norms and a correlation between Control Beliefs, Perceived Facilitation and Perceived Behavioral Control. The results however, indicated that the model was not applicable as a whole but it was partially supported since three main factors in the model (attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control) did not directly lead to intention together. Perceived Behavioral Control as a factor in the research (a perception of the availability of social media as a source of information they intend to attend) had a significant correlation with intention.

This illustrates that a stronger presence of social media with effective advertising and information flow to digital natives about the universities they intend to attend could be a major drive to increase their intention to attend the HEI they already have in mind.

Both study findings reveal that social media (in both cases Facebook presence) has a stronger effect on existing students and consolidate brand trust and brand loyalty, however in high school students Facebook presence does not directly affect their intention or motivation to attend to a specific institution.

6.2 Limitations of the Research

The first study investigated how the experiences of university community on the social media may be related to how the university students behave. The study setting resulted in a large number of international students who were studying in a location away from their home country. Perhaps the results may differ if the study is conducted in a different context on students who are more homogenous or from the local community. However, as the trend in international mobility of students increase, more universities are likely to face similar challenges that are discussed in the current study. A large proportion of our respondents were male. While this also reflects the larger ratio of male students studying in the university where the study was conducted, it may have an influence on our findings. Another limitation may be the use of an online survey, which resulted in a low response rate (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair, & Okumus, 2015). It is recommended that future research include respondents from a variety of higher education institutions where the differing levels of university reputation can also be included as a factor in the model.

The second study was conducted in high schools in North Cyprus which limited to get results in a various demographical and more international setting. The fact that the study was conducted in the local community was a limitation as most of the students in North Cyprus already plan to pursue their education abroad due to the closed economy as a result of the international embargoes. Qualified or not, high school students tend to travel and study abroad in a university just because it is abroad and because this may be the only opportunity for them to experience a new culture.

It is recommended that further research include higher number of high school students from different countries in order to see how Facebook presence of universities effect high school students from various countries that may result in international student mobility.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

Consumer behavior has changed tremendously in recent years due to the constant developments in social media. Many brands focus on social media more as they use it to advertise and observe the user behavior to shape their marketing strategies. Jashari (2017) assert that digital groups form brand communities or anti-brand communities, observe a particular behavior then copy it. The authors also reveal that various factors influence consumer behavior and they name these factors as *psychographic* variables. These variables include motivation and attitude and according to the authors, social media affects these variables thus the consumer behavior. Literature on the consumer studies found that sources with credibility, possess more power to change consumer's attitude than sources that do not have credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1953)

The scope of this thesis has been students as consumers for Higher Education Institution. Current and prospective student behaviors on social media were investigated along with communication, behavior and social psychology theories in order to measure whether they are persuaded by the information they see on social media and whether this information forms intention toward a certain behavior. Current and Prospective students have been the focus of the research due to the fact that HEI are active on social media as brands, enabling students become followers or consumers of that brand.

When students and their families are to make decisions about which university to choose for higher education, they are not able to make sense of the complex and detailed issues ranging from quality of the faculty and the physical resources to employability of graduates and thus rely on the brand to simplify this decision (Judson et al., 2008). Judson (2008) suggested that the brand strength of a university is dependent on how distinctive the university's brand is perceived to be, and the clarity of the branding message, how involved the university is in the promotion of the brand and the university's brand image. Similarly, employers also rely on the brand to assess the job seekers that have degrees from the rapidly growing number of universities and academic programs, since it would be too costly for them to attempt to evaluate quality of the educational outcomes of the large number of universities. An effective social media presence including university Facebook pages will assist to develop a stronger university brand community which will facilitate the identification with the university community and the university brand. The Facebook community will allow the university to clearly express the distinctiveness of its brand. If used effectively the reach of the message can be tremendously higher compared to traditional media. The university community members can share the posts of the university to their contacts, friends or followers which will extend the reach of the message. The community will only share the messages or posts if it is interesting enough and if they are willing to use their reputation to be associated with it. They may not wish to share material that is uninteresting for their followers or that they personally are not confident to endorse.

Previous research on international university students studying in North Cyprus had revealed that although students reported high levels of satisfaction overall, the majority of students had stated that if they had the opportunity to do so they would transfer to

another university (Mehtap-Smadi & Hashemipour, 2011). Many international students are very sensitive to the cost of the university and increases in fees can mean students transferring to universities that offer lower fees and are willing to transfer their accumulated course credits. The model in this research model demonstrates that loyalty is related to trust and trust is associated to the student identification with the university. A stronger presence in social media is likely to strengthen the identification with the community and the university brand.

As for high school students in the second study, what they perceive in social media could be completely different. Although media acts as a processor in decision making process, this might not apply to some cases. Tim Reilly, the founder of the term Web 2.0, considered this web progress a new internet revolution that enabled two way communication and information dissemination and a game changer since it decentralized information and led the way to be the "the architecture of participation". (O'Reilly, 2005 as cited in Fuchs 2014, p.32). When consumers are exposed to a certain information, they are active (Sternhal and Craig, 1982). However the fast distribution of the message may slow the encoding of the message (Shapiro and Varian, 1998). At this point, it is extremely crucial that the consumer is attentive to that type of information (Silverman, 2001). It can be clearly stated that due to the overloaded information social media delivers to individuals, brands need to pay special attention whether the information delivered reaches to a target group. In this study, the target group was high school students and in the beginning, it was mentioned how much time digital natives spend on the internet, thus, on social media. This may also be an indication of why students' intentions do not necessarily result in behavior as they are overloaded with information from various institutions. The fact that young

people-in this case high school students- use social media and the information they obtain from this service gratify them does not necessarily mean will result in behavior. A strong analysis on how behavior is shaped in social media should thoroughly be investigated by companies and brands before applying marketing strategies to social media.

This thesis is the first study to reveal the relationship between brand trust, brand loyalty and intention by dwelling on how user behavior may be formed along with specifically Persuasion and Communication Theory and Uses and Gratifications theory. Uses and Gratifications theory dwell on the reasons why people use media to gratify a specific need. It has been argued that with social media individuals are active participants and processor of the received information from social media. The second study specifically acknowledges that people use social media to obtain information however they do not necessarily react to that information. In this case, the fact that students obtain information from Facebook for intended HEI, however do not necessarily apply to that university. Within Uses and Gratifications theory, it has been suggested that social media contributes to information delivery to people (Chen, Clifford, & Wells, 2002), online brand communities search information and is gratified by that information on that particular brand on social media (Muntinga et al., 2011; Raacke & BondsRaacke, 2008) and the need to search for a particular brand is motivating for consumers as it contains direct information from the brand. (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004; Lin & Lu, 2011; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

The social media behavior has also been the focus on many researchers and many scholars thus the content that trigger social media behavior should also be thoroughly investigated in order to explore the reasons of why people may or may not turn their

intentions to behavior based on what they see on social media. Social Media behavior study by Dolan et al. (2016) defines engagement behavior as high and low and separates content that brands advertise into two. These are informative and persuasive content and the author reiterates that entertaining and persuasive content has higher engagement levels on the user. The results of the second study in this thesis with high school students also assert that although informative content could gratify the user to a certain extent, the content may not persuade the user to be motivated to a certain behavior. Schunesenberg,de Jong, and Goel (2012) in their research on studying abroad applied Theory of Planned Behavior to 254 undergraduate students with a view to predict the factors leading to intentions. The authors depicted that the expectations of the family and prospective job expectations could also play a role in their intentions. In the study, it is stated that former participants who studied abroad could be integrated to the Higher Education Institutions' marketing strategy in order to stimulate intention. In short, the authors suggest a model where families, former participants of the mentioned program in the study, are present for marketing. The second study in this thesis thus also bears importance in revealing the importance of the participation of parents and former members of that community into marketing strategy. The students' intention clearly is shaped by many factors and parents' opinion in which is measured in the scope of Normative Belief as a factor is directly related to their attitude. Therefore integrating parents to the marketing in Higher Education Institutions should be taken into consideration in this digital era.

The two studies in this thesis should give an insight to researches to focus on the behavior of distinctive users of social media users in Higher Education Institutions and High Schools for more effective social media marketing on student recruitment and

retention. Once the students enroll to an institution, they use social media to follow their Higher Education Institution which then turns to brand identification, brand trust and brand loyalty. With prospective students however, the aforementioned persuasive information or behavior may not be formed by social media and is not necessarily motivated by certain factors such as attitude and subjective norms.

Communication and Persuasion Theory (Hovland et al., 1953) identifies the characteristics of the factors on how persuasion could succeed or fail. The communicators in the scope of this thesis are HEI, the communication is the information distributed on social media and the recipients are the current and prospective students. In order to analyze how communication and persuasion may succeed or fail social behavior theories should be applied to study the user behavior as to see which content and social media strategy may result in persuasive or successful persuasion. The results of the first study reveal that a successful persuasion may occur if students identify with the brand and use the university's social media page to gratify the ongoing information need. The second study however, reiterates that an intention to be persuaded by an HEI may occur but will not necessarily result in a behavior.

In today's educational sector, with all its values and norms, Higher Educational Institutions are now brands that need to be represented on social media. By understating the current and prospective student behavior, HEI may engage in social media marketing activities both with informative and persuasive content for stronger brand equity. The tailored messages to different student types; for instance an already registered or a prospective student, will strengthen the brand as nowadays online consumer is more individualized. (Smith & McFee, 2003). Today's era is filled with traceable information. The consumer behavior is easily recorded; user identification

and personalization of information by search engines is easily and explicitly extracted (Saxena & Agarval & Katiyar, 2016).

The biggest search engine Google also patented that user behavior identification is present on social media[9]. The content the users like, share and endorse reveal abundant information about them; therefore profiling the behavior of the consumers may add immense benefits to their marketing strategy as well as defining their potential users or consumers on the condition that companies and institutions respect the privacy of the user and do not manipulate the information. Social Media Behavior may assist in brand positioning on social media and as Rauschnabel et al. (2016) suggest; brand love, which is a segment of University Brand Personality Concept may contribute to universities' marketing plan. The authors point out that in order to understand brand love, understanding the psychology behind that drive is equally crucial which once again reiterates the strong relationship between behavior and social media.

7.1 Suggestions for Further Researches

Further research should include of how specific content type relates to persuasive behavior and what type of content triggers intention to apply and enroll to a university for stronger brand identification, brand trust and brand loyalty for both current and prospective students of Higher Education Institutions.

For overall marketing success Higher Education Institutions should specifically study all shareholders' behavior on social media and integrate the outcomes to their marketing strategy. The fact that social media is alive, viable and sustainable platform

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[9] https://patents.google.com/patent/US20130073388A1/en

with constant upprades, enforces Higher Education Institution Managements to follow the changing behaviors of the users.

Richard Bagozzi (1992) affirms that the relationship between intention and behavior for a directed goal is affirmed on decisions, motivation and certain conditions. Considering that the goal is either to recruit or retain students for Higher Education Institutions, directing them to a certain behavior through either emotional or a cognitive process is a must. Branding efforts cannot be completed without studying the user behavior. Bearing in mind that 8 Million students are expected to study abroad by 2025, these students' user identity and behavior patterns on social media becomes highly crucial for branding strategies of Higher Education Institutions with a view to plan the strategies, methods and models to be present on social media for a stronger brand news dissemination and advertising.

Another fact that should be taken into consideration for further researches, are the developments in other social media platforms. This thesis solely focused on branding and advertising of brands on Facebook as a Social Networking Site. However, as of 2018, Instagram has also been an effective social networking site. Jeff Bullas, a digital influencer has reported that Instagram is now the most engaging platform for the social media audience[10] with more than 800 Million users and its engagement rate is higher than Facebook. *Locowise*, a digital measurement for agencies, also reported that Instagram has still the highest engagement rate among all social media platforms.[11] With 25 Million business profiles Instagram can be the new perfect platform for social media marketing. It has also been reported that 80% of Instagram users are outside

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[10] http://www.jeffbullas.com/how-to-build-a-massive-instagram-following-from-scratch/
[11] https://www.dreamgrow.com/instagram-facebook-advertising/

United States of America[12] which makes it an immaculate platform for Higher Education Institutions which are aiming to enroll students from abroad. Further study should also include how Instagram affects user behavior, intention, brand trust and brand loyalty.

A vital further study that can be pursued as a further study, would be investigating how user behavior is affected by the data security on social media. As of 2018, Facebook has been dealing with data breach problem with the Cambridge Analytica scandal. In March 2018, the news came to reveal how Cambridge Analytica, a data collecting company, was accused of using 87 Million user data without notifying them. Facebook claimed responsibility for not being protective over their user data and Mark Zuckerberg was invited to the U.S. Senate for testimony. The company owner stated that his company was open to regulations and promised for the betterment of user data protection. Right after this, Facebook updated its users' security settings and informed them that they could delete applications they signed in using Facebook.

Following Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook's reputation was under threat. A campaign names #deletefacebook was endorsed by several companies and some companies announced that their company accounts on Facebook were deleted. Elon Musk, the owner of Tesla and SpaceX companies joined the movement by deleting the company accounts and asking "What's Facebook?" on Twitter on March 23, 2018[13]. This tweet was believed to send a message to his followers that Musk is not interested in Facebook anymore. One of the oldest business magazines, Fortune, has reported

[12] https://www.omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/
[13] https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/23/elon-musk-delete-facebook-spacex-tesla-mark-zuckerberg

that Facebook had lots 35 Billion dollars market value following Cambridge Analytica[14].

From marketing and branding perspective, it is inevitable that Facebook will face backlash and criticism from brands, as they may not see Facebook as a safe platform to advertise their businesses. Cambridge Analytica was the second disappointment of for brands. Mark Zuckerberg had earlier announced that public content from businesses were going to be less visible as the company wanted to encourage "meaningful interactions among people"[15]. All these developments on Facebook is thought to make changes on how brands will see social media however it would be correct to point out that Facebook is still a dominant social media platform for businesses and is expected to make certain changes to gain brands' and users' trust. Further research, thus, can also focus on the effects of the aftermath of Cambridge Analytica Scandal and its effects of the users.

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[14] http://fortune.com/2018/03/19/facebook-stock-share-price-cambridge-analytica-donald-trump/
[15] https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104413015393571

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Screenshot from EMU Twitter Account

Appendix B: Study 1 Online Survey to University Students

Please state your :

Age:

Gender:

Department:

Country:

CGPA:

Strength of the University Community on Facebook (UCF)

Measures the degree to which members of the university Facebook page feel bonded to each other, share information and experience, and the extent to which they find these exchanges useful.

The followers of EMU Facebook page:

1. Share a common bond with other followers
2. Are strongly affiliated with other members
3. The followers benefit from this community

Items were adopted from (Ho, 2015; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013) developed by (Srinivasan, Anderson, & Ponnavolu, 2002) . Cronbach alpha reported in the literature ranged from 0.66 (Laroche et al., 2013) - 0.77 (Ho, 2015).

Student Identification with the university as a community

1. I see myself as a part of EMU community
2. If this community planned something, I would think it as something "we" would do rather than something "they" would do.
3. I am very attached to this community

Student identification with the university as a brand

1. When someone compliments EMU, it feels like a personal compliment
2. When someone criticizes EMU, it feels like a personal insult
3. I am very interested in what others think about this university

In role behavior

1. It is very likely that I will continue my education in EMU

2. I may continue my further studies in EMU
3. Even if I had difficulties in my courses, I will not consider leaving EMU

Extra role behavior

1. I will recommend this university to my friends and relatives
2. I will tell my relatives and friends about the good experience in this university
3. I am willing to join the activity hold by the university in the future

Items were adapted from (Laroche et al., 2013) developed by (Srinivasan et al., 2002)

University Brand Trust

1. Education that my university provides fulfills my expectations
2. I rely on the quality of education at EMU
3. The academic quality of EMU never disappoints me

University Brand Loyalty

1. I consider myself to be loyal to the university
2. If there was a lower tuition fee alternative in another university, I would still be in EMU
3. I am willing to pay more for an EMU degree

Adapted from:

Ho, C. W. (2015). Identify with community or company? An investigation on the consumer behavior in Facebook brand community. *Telematics and Informatics*, *32*(4), 930–939. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2015.05.002

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Appendix C: Survey for Study 2 conducted to Turkish speaking high school students in North Cyprus

1. Adresiniz
   ....

2. Cinsiyetiniz
   a) Erkek
   b) Kadın

3. Yaşınız
   ....

4. Eğer bu anketten önce DAÜ hakkında bir bilginiz varsa bu bilgiyi nasıl edindiniz ?
   a) Sosyal medya
   b) Fuar
   c) Okul Temsilcisi
   d) Arkadaşlar, Aile
   e) Diğer

Lütfen aşağıdaki cümleleri kendinize uygunluğuna göre **1** (**Kesinlikle katılıyorum**)

ve **5** (**Kesinlikle katılmıyorum**) arasında değerlendiriniz.

	1	2	3	4	5
Direct Measure Attitude DMA 1 Bir üniversite hakkında bilgi almak için Facebook'u kullanmak çok faydalıdır.					
Direct Measure Attitude DMA 2 Facebook üzerinden yaptığı paylaşımlara göre bir üniversiteye kayıt yaptırmak çok akıllıcadır.					
Outcome Evaluation OE1 Sosyal medya bize bilginin kaynağından, doğrudan güvenilir bilgi sağlar					
Outcome Evaluation OE 2 Facebook paylaşımlarında gördüğüm öğrencilerin yaşadığı deneyimleri benim de yaşamam çok olasıdır.					
Behavioural Belief Reverse BBR1 Önemli kararlar vermek için sosyal medyayı kullanmak hatalı bir davranıştır.					
Direct Measure Subjective Norm DMSN1 Fikrine değer verdiğim çoğu kişi üniversiteler hakkında bilgi toplarken sosyal medyayı kullanmamı onaylar.					
Direct Measure Subjective Norm DMSN2 Üniversite seçiminde sosyal medyada bulunan bilgileri kullanmam normal karşılanır.					
Direct Measure Subjective Norm DMSN3 Gençler karar verirken sosyal medyayı kullanır.					
Normative Belief NB1					

Ailem seçeceğim üniversite hakkında sosyal medyayı kullanarak bilgi toplamamı olumlu karşılar.				
Normative Belief NB2 Arkadaşlarım seçeceğim üniversite hakkında sosyal medyayı kullanarak bilgi toplamamı olumlu karşılar.				
Motivation to Comply MC1 Üniversite seçiminde bilgi almak için sosyal medyayı kullanmam konusunda ailemin düşünceleri benim için önemlidir.				
Motivation to ComplyMC2 Üniversite seçiminde bilgi almak için sosyal medyayı kullanmam konusunda arkadaşlarımın düşünceleri benim için önemlidir.				
Direct Measure Perceived Behavioral Control DMPBC1 Benim için üniversite seçiminde Facebook'u kullanmak çok kullanışlıdır.				
Direct Measure Perceived Behavioral Control DMPBC2 Facebook'ta bulacağım bilgilerin doğru olduğuna eminim.				
Direct Measure Perceived Behavioral Control DMPBC3 Bütün ilgilendiğim üniversitelerin bir Facebook sayfası mevcuttur.				
Control Belief CB1 Üniversitedeki faaliyetler hakkında Facebook sayfasından doğru bilgi alacağıma eminim.				
Control Belief CB2 Eğitim ücretleri hakkında Facebook sayfasından doğru bilgi alacağıma eminim				
Control Belief CB3 Kampüsteki yaşam hakkında Facebook sayfasından doğru bilgi alacağıma eminim.				
Sosyal Medyada varlığını gördüğünüz **üç** üniversiteyi sıralayınız. 1._____ 2._____ 3._____				
Intention Bu üniversitelerden birine gitmeyi planlıyorum.				
Intention Bu üniversitelerden birine gitmek için gayret göstereceğim.				
Intention Bu üniversitelerden birine gitme niyetim vardır.				

Adapted from Presley, A., Damron-Martinez, D., & Zhang, L. (2010). A study of business student choice to study abroad: A test of the theory of planned behavior. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, *21*(4), 227-247.