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Do Social Media Affect Museums' Brand Equity? An Exploratory Qualitative Study

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Abstract. The beneficial role of traditional marketing communication tools on branding performance is a dominant feature of marketing bibliography. Moreover, the advent of social media has definitely resurged this research interest following the revolution both within For Profit and Non Profit Organizations communications (NPOs and FPOs) context. Thus, there is a growing trend towards the impact of both e- marketing and social media tools on destination branding procedures. However, due to its infant nature, very little is known on the association between social media and brand equity. No single study so far has empirically explored the role of social media on museums' branding. Addressing previous calls within FPOs and NPOs' sector and having recently reviewed and established theoretically the positive link, (1) first, between the social media and museums (2) second, between social media and NPOs' brand equity and (3), third between social media on museum branding equity. The present study examines through a qualitative method the social media impact on museums brand equity. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, that have been held for a month with communication officers of 30 museums. This work contributes to existing knowledge of multidisciplinary research interests such as museum branding, social media marketing and tourism marketing, both by confirming the beneficial contribution of social media on museums' brand equity, visitors' satisfaction and visitors' engagement, and by providing valuable managerial insights.

Keywords: Social Media, Museums, Brand equity, Qualitative study

1 Introduction

Central to the entire discipline of branding is the concept of marketing communication tools [1-3]. In the light of the social media era various researchers have explored its effect both within For Profit Organizations (henceforth, FPOs) [1,4-10]. Various studies have also explored the impact of e- marketing and social media tools on destination branding [11-14]. Nevertheless, social media is becoming a vital tool for museums' sustainability given its multidimensional effect [15], few studies have investigated its impact on brand equity [1,15,16]. Especially, within NPOs only scant studies – at a desk research level- have investigated this impact [7,15- 21]. Currently, there are no data on the link between social media use and museums' customer- based brand equity as defined by Belenioti and Vassiliadis [16,24], Liu, Liu and Lin [26].

Therefore, this study aims to contribute within the link between social media and CCBE by exploring the following research questions

RQ1: Does different social media use affects museums Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE)?

RQ2: Does the use of social media increase visitors' satisfaction?

RQ3: Does the use of social media boost the brand engagement with visitors?

2 Literature Review

In recent years, museums represent a shift towards branding. Despite, the ambiguity between brands skeptics and brand advocates, "branding is the heart of the future museum" ([27]: 2). However, Belenioti and Vassiliadis (2016) concluded that research on brand equity and NPOs - along with museums' customer based brand equity- remains in its infancy [16]. For instance, only Camarero *et al.*, (2012) identified 4 factors as determinants of brand equity; brand value, brand recognition, brand quality and brand uniqueness [29]. They also confirmed a positive link between brand equity both with visitors' satisfaction and willingness to pay- On the other hand, focused on customer based brand equity in museums and inspired by the link among brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, brand value and brand loyalty within in tourism field [30,31]. Liu, Liu and Lin, [26] identified that brand values as mediator of museums' customer-based brand equity. In addition, the same authors showed a positive link between consumer recognition and perceived quality along with brand image. They also confirmed the impact of perceived quality on brand image. Moreover, their study revealed that brand image, brand quality and brand awareness do not directly affect brand loyalty although the last is a critical factor to the decision process.

Besides, marketing communication tools have a pivotal role in brand equity both in FPOs and NPOs context [2,3,7,8,15,33-36]. Precisely, prior studies link social media with brand equity both in FPOs [1,39-41,44,45,79,80]. Furthermore, the available studies support previous research that social media use and brand equity boost within NPOs context [8,42,43,51] as well. Social media also boost perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand trust [53,54].

Finally, bibliography shows a positive link of social media use and consumer brand engagement in FPOs context [48,56-60] or destination marketing organizations [20,61-63]. Likewise, there is an association within OB/ GYN healthcare NPOs, [26,65] and cultural NPOs such as festivals [7] and museums [49,67-74].

3 Methodology

The survey examines how museums exploit social media to boost their branding, visitors' engagement and boost visitors' satisfaction. A pre-test questionnaire was also distributed to 10 respondents to verify its credibility and its ease of comprehension. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 communication officers, with a mean age of 45 years. Interviews were conducted from May 2017 to July 2017. A random sample of museums was recruited based on the 158 museums referred to the official cultural guide launched by the Greek Ministry of Culture and the report of

Museums and archaeological sites (visitors, receipts) published by ELSTAT (12/2016). Primary inclusion criterion for the participants was their affiliation with social media -corporate communication within those museums context and museums availability. 30 Greek Museums contributed to our research study data collection method. Respondents were museum practitioners and representatives of 30 Greek Museums in central and north Greece, region of Attica (Central Greece) and North Greece (Regions of Macedonia & Thrace) serving as communication officers. The interview lasted 45 minutes. The questionnaire is based on the prior work of various renowned researchers such Chung, Marcketti and Fiore [30], Whelan, [76] and international organizations within museum sector (UNESCO); while new constructs were also added given the insights of literature review analysis. The new set of questions investigates managers' perception on the association between social media and customer-based brand equity of museums visitors, brand awareness in museums, brand engagement and visitors' satisfaction.

4 Findings

Regarding the first question, respondents were asked about the link between social media and museum customer- based brand equity dimensions –as defined by Liu, Liu and Lin [26], such brand values, brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand identity, brand awareness. Particularly, table 1 shows an intensively positive correlation between social media and brand awareness (45/100). Similarly, within central Greece's context, a positive correlation was also found between social media and brand values (15.3/100), between social media and brand loyalty (13.5/100), between social media and brand identity (13.8/100) and finally, between social media and perceived quality (11.8/100).

Table 1. Social media boost on museums' customer brand equity perception; The Central & North Greece respondents.

	Brand Awareness	Brand Identity	Perceived Museum Quality	Brand Loyalty	Brand Values
Central Greece	45	13,8	11,8	13,5	15,3
North Greece	25,4	15,4	18,8	15,4	10,8

In the same vein, in North Greece's context (see table 1), strong evidence was found between social media and museums' customer- based brand equity dimensions. Specifically, respondents concluded that social media boost massively brand awareness (25.4/100) and perceived quality (18.8/100). Then, brand identity and brand loyalty followed (15.4/100) while brand values reveal the lowest percentage (10.8/100). In a nutshell, both in central and north Greece findings revealed that there is a positive

correlation between social media use and customer-based brand equity. Precisely, both in Central Greece and North Greece findings (see Table 1) reveal an intensively positive correlation first between social media and brand awareness (45/100 and 25.4/100, respectively). However, there is an ambiguity regarding social media impact on variables such as perceived quality and brand values, given that managers in Central Greece conclude that social media effects on a larger scale brand values (15.3/100 and 10.8/100, conversely) than perceived quality (11.8/100 in Central Greece and 18.8/100, in North Greece).

The next section of the survey was concerned with managers' perception on social media impact towards visitors' satisfaction. Comparing the two results, we conclude that both in central and north Greece, a positive link between social media and visitors' satisfaction (see Figure 1).

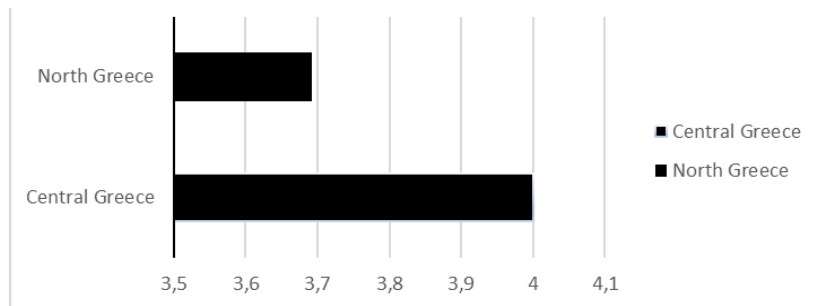


Fig 1. Social media boost on Visitors' Satisfaction level; managers' perception

Finally, in the same vain managers reported that social media do use boost visitors' engagement. There is a positive relation between social media and engagement both in museums of north (mean =4.46) and central Greece (mean = 4.65) (see Table 2).

Table 2 Social media boost on Visitors' Engagement; managers' perceptions

	Average
■ North Greece	4,46
■ Central Greece	4,65

5 Discussion, Conclusions and Limitations

Overall, this paper supports prior studies linking social media with brand equity both in FPOs [1,41,79-83]. Second, regarding the link between social media and brand equity, these results support previous research that social media use and brand equity boost within NPOs context as well [42,50,54,63,85-87,89,90]. The study is in accord with similar studies in cultural tourism small-scale event and NPOs, such as North

Greece Food Festival [7] or museums [27,51,92]. Regarding the link between social media and satisfaction (RQ2), the study also accords with earlier observations, which showed that social media boost perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand trust [79,95].

Finally, the study corroborates with prior findings on the positive link between social media use and consumer brand engagement in FPOs context [30,45,49,79,99,101,103]. Likewise, this study confirms previous insights within OB/GYN healthcare industry [104], and cultural NPOs such as festivals [7] and museums [15,30,49,67,76,108-110,112]. Despite its exploratory nature and limited sample, the study valuable insights to communication officers and museums practitioners. Future studies are welcome to validate these insights. The impact of social media on connected passengers [58] could also provide interesting insights within museum brands.

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