

## ANALYSING THE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING CONTENT OF LEADING ARAB AIRPORTS

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### ABSTRACT

The research highlights the importance of social media in airport marketing on Facebook (as a leading social media marketing platform in this field). The social media marketing content of major Arab airports on Facebook are analyzed with an aim to explore the most common marketing messages / themes used on selected sites. The analysis covers the marketing content of leading airports in Egypt (Cairo international airport), the United Arab of Emirates (Dubai -Sharjah), Saudi Arabia, (King Abdul-Aziz- King Khaled) Qatar (Hamad), Kuwait, Muscat and Bahrain. The research mainly aims to explore new methods to increase the popularity of leading Arab airports' on Facebook. The study proposes specific types / categories of marketing messages that can guarantee a high level of likeability and better level of engagement among travelers. The primary findings confirm that major Arab airports can improve their level of likeability among users on Facebook by designing and posting a more effective selection of marketing message types on their respective sites. The research concluded the most popular marketing message types among users by using a computer-assisted quantitative content analysis tool.

**Keywords:** airport marketing -content analysis--corporate likeability- marketing message types-social media

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### INTRODUCTION

#### The concept of social media marketing

Over the last decade, the world has become more connected than ever before. This is mainly due to the proliferation of the internet, the increasing popularity of social networks and the meteoric rise of smartphone usage. According to Google, 80% of travelers today plan their travels online and half of them use mobile devices to access travel information (Simplifying, 2013). In the early 2000s, the social media revolution began with advent of Web 2.0 which fostered multilateral and multidirectional collaboration, discussion, and sharing of information among users on the internet. The internet became a two-way communication. This evolution was empowered by the many information and communication technologies (ICT) in numerous areas, namely: faster computing-smart mobile devices-media sharing sites- cloud computing. Social media platforms can be categorized into: -blogs, microblogs, media and documents sharing sites, syndication applications, location-based applications and social media management tools. (Stambaugh, 2012). The social media concept can be summarized in the following definition: "the group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Halpern, 2014).

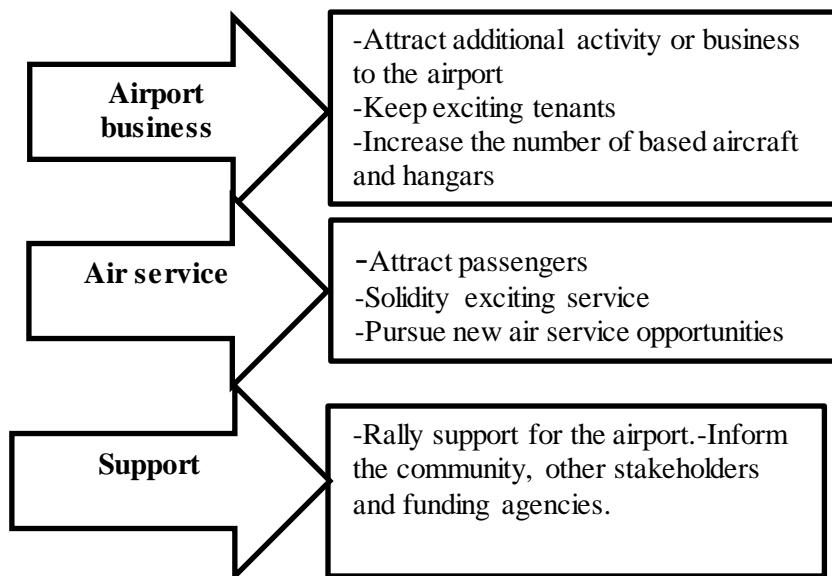
The business of social business can be defined as the implication of social technologies as a formal component of the business process which revolves around customers and stakeholders connect to your business and how to reshape your business to better understand, accept and innovate based on their involvement. Social business is about integrating all business functions: customer support, marketing, the executive team and any other business-related aspects. This is done with the aim of creating collaborative innovation and engagement tied to company's objectives (Evans, 2010). Due to the low-cost of social media, it will be the future for marketing communications. The multiple and reciprocal connections between friends and social networking sites, such as Facebook and Myspace, help companies gain insight into the market. The data provided by social networking has assisted huge corporations such as IBM, Helwett-Packard and Microsoft in profiling and designing better communication approaches for their employees and consumers. NielsenGlobal survey confirms that social media is a reflection of the migration of consumers' trusts from companies to other consumers which proves that fewer consumers are still relying upon company-generated advertising (Kotler, 2010). The term 'social media marketing' generally refers to using online services for relationship selling. Social media services / channels make innovative use of new online technologies to accomplish familiar communication and marketing goals (Zimmermann, 2010). Social media marketing seeks to engage customers where they naturally spend their time. Social business engages with what

customers are talking about and connects this back into business where it can be processed to create the next round of customer experience and hence the next round of customer conversations (Evans, 2010). Social media marketing depends upon finding relevant ways to enter consumer social conversations with engaging and significant brand messages. Successful social network marketing is associated with making relevant and genuine contributions to consumer conversations. Marketers face the difficult task of breaking through all the social media noise and acquire a presence on the web. Today's consumers rely intensely on social media to have conversations, express their opinions, needs, ideas and complaints via millions of blogs, tweets, videos and comments on a daily-basis.

Today's sales forces are growing up their use of social networking media, from proprietary online customer communities to webinars and even Twitter, Facebook and YouTube applications. A recent survey of B2B marketers found that whereas they have recently lowered on traditional media and event spending, 68% are investing more on social media (Kotler, 2012). Social media marketing depends upon finding relevant ways to enter consumer social conversations with engaging and significant brand messages. Successful social network marketing is associated with making relevant and genuine contributions to consumer conversations. Marketers face the difficult task of breaking through all the social media noise and acquire a presence on the web. Today's consumers rely intensely on social media to have conversations, express their opinions, needs, ideas and complaints via millions of blogs, tweets, videos and comments on a daily-basis. Today's sales forces are growing up their use of social networking media, from proprietary online customer communities to webinars and even Twitter, Facebook and YouTube applications. A recent survey of B2B marketers found that whereas they have recently lowered on traditional media and event spending, 68% are investing more on social media (Kotler, 2012). Social media differs from traditional industrial media channels; while the latter depends upon highly expensive one-static broadcast technologies (such as: TV-radio-magazines-newspapers), new web technologies facilitated the process of creating and distributing messages for advertisers without having to pay high costs. The social media channels also provide consumers the opportunity to interchange with two-way interactive their feedback media (Zarella, 2010). Effective social media techniques include: branding (corporate image building), online customer care, event sponsorship, celebrity endorsements, online contests / games and tourism offers.

### Airport social media marketing trends

Airports are not apart from the ongoing social media revolution. In fact, airports are increasingly using social media in two main areas: 1-Marketing 2-Passenger communication (Halpern, 2014).



Source: Airport cooperative research program (2010)

Figure 1- Major Airport Marketing Goals

Today, airports are obliged to effectively market their services in order to attract travelers/ tourists and consequently achieve financial self-sufficiency. Airports managers are concerned about exceeding customer expectations regarding various airport services. Airport marketing activities revolve around numerous goals, of which: community awareness of the airport-public relations (coverage of airport projects, safety standards, sustainability and land use)-air service development, retention or reinstatement-passenger growth and retention-growth of existing activities and business-growth or development of a new activity/business at the airport-market expansion-market segmentation-quality awareness.

Airports tend to use the following promotional channels to achieve their marketing goals (in order of importance): 1-the internet 2-newspaper/magazine articles 3-radio ads 4-press releases 5-billboards 6- TV ads 7-corporate events 8-newspaper ads 9-brochure 10-e-newsletters 11-educational/training seminars 12-airport open houses 13-magazine ads.

The above medium ranking assures that the internet is continuously becoming the leading airport marketing tool in today's international market. In recent years, the air travel marketplace is witnessing a continuous growth in the areas of both electronic and social media marketing (Airport cooperative research program, 2010).

Today, tourists expect airports to be active on social media networks. On the other hand, airports became fully aware of the potential of connecting with customers with an aim to drive key business goals on various social sites (Simplifying, 2014).

Social media tools help the airport management to easily interact with customers and respectively allow them to boost numerous marketing campaigns. These campaigns include a variety of promotional elements such as: advertising, sales promotion, public relations (PR) and publicity. Other uses include a variety of managerial functions such as: customer service, crisis management, and in areas of research and development (conduction of passenger surveys). The mutual communication between the management and customers can be classified as a valuable asset for the airport business, such as the discussing issues related to route development opportunities with airlines, tour operators and other stakeholders (Halpern, 2014).

Social media is continuously gaining significant importance in enhancing passenger airport experience, growing airport revenue and in creating passenger loyalty. One of the most common uses of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, is for creating informal communications with passengers to locate facilities and services or provide feedback on the overall airport experience. Airport operator's use social media promote their airports by advertising new services by airlines and airport concessionaires, offering discounts, marketing special events or conducting contests. There are various cases where airports are utilizing social media. For example, San Diego International Airport promotes its Green Build Program via social media. George Bush Intercontinental Airport / Houston provided advance photos of its United's new Terminal B South using its Flickr and Twitter accounts. London Gatwick Airport used Sticky bits with bar codes to broadcast videos to passengers in areas affected by ongoing constructions.

Airport social media is also vital in flight disruption management (e.g. flight delays and updates-crisis). During Hurricane Sandy in October 2012, the airport used social media to inform passengers about flight status during the storm. Other experiences are also linked to branding, of which: London Gatwick promoted itself as a family friendly airport by teaming with 'Sound Cloud' (an online audio distribution platform) by offering free download of children books (Perry, 2013).

There are other specific uses of social media by airports and they include the following: fare sales-launching services- real-time passenger notification- post customer suggestions- gather opinions about future projects- building support and engagement about several new services- route development- create an online community- organize contests- post photos and videos (Zogg, 2011).

During the upcoming years, numerous airports will be amplifying their efforts in social media. In 2017, it is estimated that all China airports (100%) will be investing in social media. Managing customer relations via social media increased with 30% of airports using this channel worldwide in 2014 comparing to 2013. It is important to note that 40% of airports are planning to invest in this field by 2017. Tracking the interaction made between airports social media sites and customers was responsible for leveraging the performance by 15% above expectations. 23% of airports use social media in notification about flight status. Social media

along with mobile technology dominate the future airport project plans regarding investment and evaluation (Société Internationale de Télécommunication Aéronautique, 2014a).

In the following, a number of significant facts about the use of social media by airports are enlisted:

1-80% of airports have internal social media policy

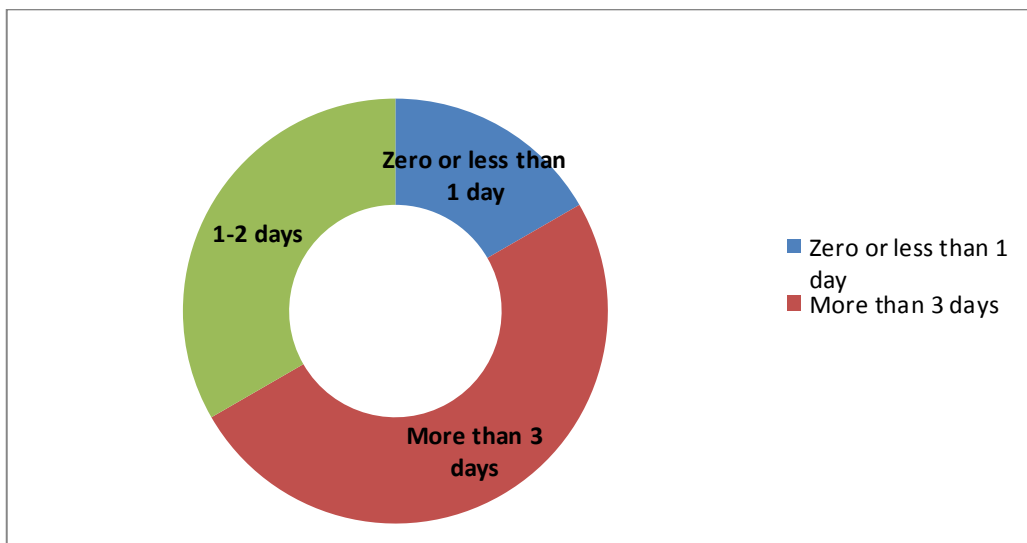
2-15% of airports have invested more than \$50 000 into the social media budget.

3-33% of airports allocated \$10 000-50 000 comparing to 20% in 2014.

4-50% of airports dedicated man-hours equivalent to 1 full-time staff to social media.

5-Advertising on social network sites is the number one spending from airports' social media budget, among other aspects polled.

6-The majority of the airports invested in at least 1 day of social media training for their staff, as shown in the following figure. Training costs is the second spending form airports social media budget (Simpliflying, 2014).



Source: (Simpliflying, 2014).

Figure 2- Airport Social Media Training

It is confirmed that trained employees outperform non-trained employees in the field of social media marketing. The main reasons are:

- They are three times more likely to share content
- They will yield three times more impressions
- They will generate between 30-50% more engagements
- They will achieve two times more the amount of clicks.
- They have the expertise to create influential content (Goodall, 2015)

7-80 % of European airports dedicated at least one day of social media training in 2014.

8-Marketing is the most common contributor to airport social media budget (the share of the marketing budget dedicated to social media comparing to other traditional and electronic mediums)

9-Corporate communications is the most common contributor of manpower to airport social media (corporate communication is a management function dedicated to the development and dissemination of information for a variety of purposes).

10-The most globally used social networks by airports are (in order of importance): 1-Facebook 2-Twitter 3-YouTube.

11-58% of airports use online contests among other campaign tactics.

12-61% of airports involve user-generated content in their campaigns.

13-52% of airports involve air service/passenger development in their social media campaigns.

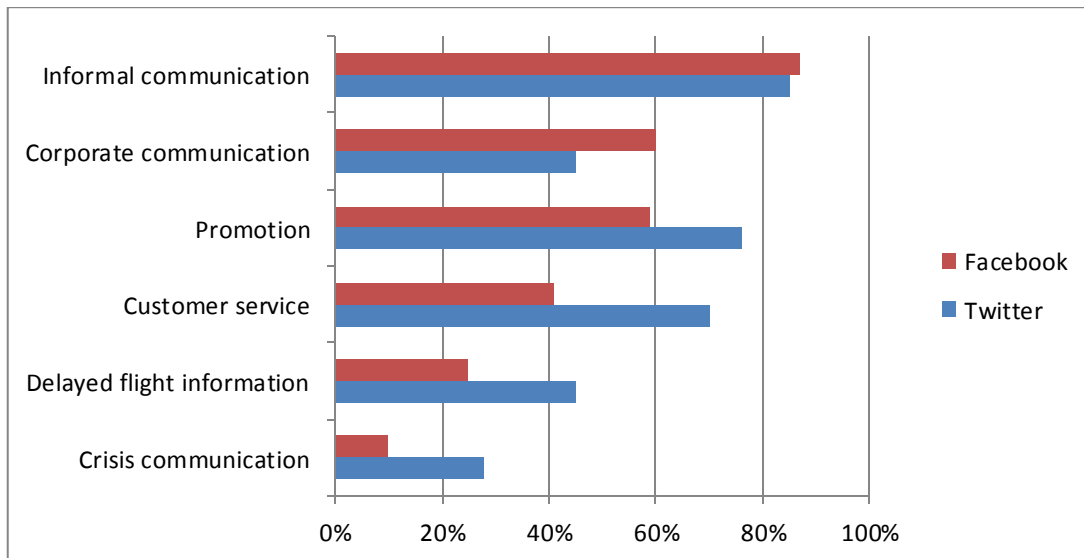
14-Brand awareness is the number one airport business goal driven by social media, while customer service is ranked in the second position in this respect. The third place is dominated by crisis management and driving loyalty as essential airport business goals.

15-61% of airports use ‘Likes’ and ‘Comments’ and ‘Shares’ as key social media metrics. 84% use the fan size as a key performance indicator (KPI).

16-60% of airports cited insufficient resource allocation as the no. 1 challenge faced by airports on social media followed by the lack of budget. In the third place, the lack of management support which is strongly related to the organizational structure of airports.

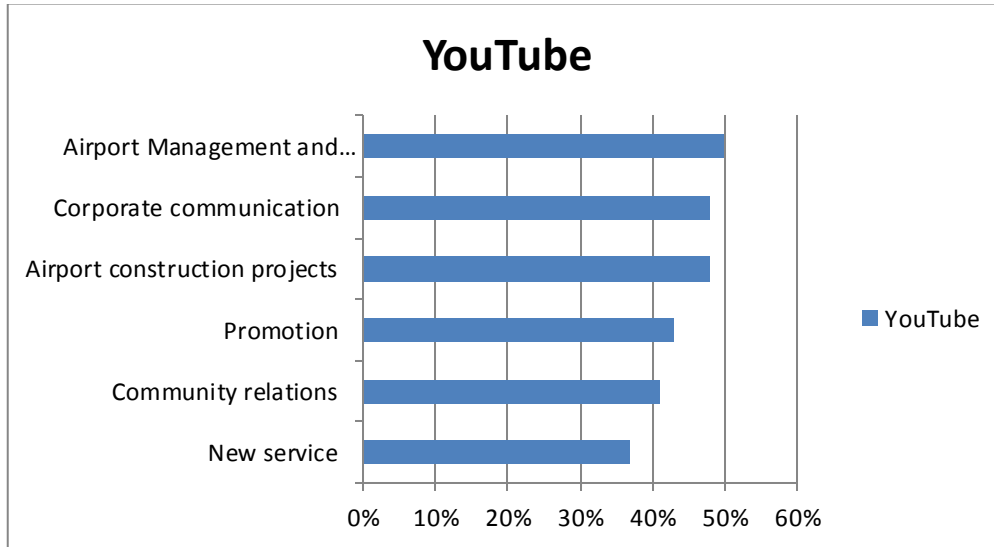
17-51% of airports stated that they will increase their social media budgets compared to 38.2% in the previous year; while 33% of airports will not change their social media budgets compared to 41% in the previous year (Simplifying, 2014).

Another survey concluded that social media platforms mostly used by airports are (in order of importance): Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The survey covered 160 airports worldwide. The specific use of these leading social media platforms includes several passenger communication features and they demonstrated in details in the following diagrams (Perry, 2013).



**Source: Perry (2013)**

**Figure 3-** The use of Facebook and Twitter by airport operators worldwide in real-time communication



Source: Perry (2013)

Figure 4- The use of YouTube by airport operators worldwide in broadcasting news and special community events

Today, social media has become an important aspect of airport quality. Airports compete in implying innovative social media practices with an aim to better market their service as well as enhancing their passenger communication systems. In the following table, a number of airport social media practices are demonstrated. Leading airports in social media utilization were chosen according to Skytrax (a consultancy that rates airlines and airports worldwide in terms related to quality).

Table 1- Best Airport Social Media Practices in Selected Airports

Airport	Social Media Practices
Helsinki	-Quality hunters: loyal online users are invited to engage into workshops to discuss overall passenger experience with the airport. -Travelers share airport travel tips via Facebook.
Heathrow	-The launching of 'Hushtags' to promote airport service awareness. -The use of microsites to exchange passenger airport stories.
Dallas Fort Worth International	-The launch of a mobile airport application platform.
Schiphol Amsterdam	-Broadcasting public relations (PR) content via social media. -Monitor online community perceptions towards the airport via market research tools.
San Francisco International	-Crisis management handling.
Gatwick	-Out of working hours Twitter customer service support. -Use of Audio network 'SoundCloud' in branding-related activities. Social photography via Instagram.

**Source: Simplifying (2013)**

Social media, along with other technological tools, are increasingly enhancing air passengers’ experience. The new trends are:

- 1- Better integration of social media with operational systems; including social logins that help understand passenger movements. Passenger tracking is empowered by Wi-Fi, google tools, surveys and customer various data.
- 2- Analyzing the content of service features along with brand value assessment in order to contribute to the leverage of bookings and retail sales.
- 3- The evolution of airport passenger databases. (Air gate solutions, 2015).

Today, passengers are seeking more personal and relevant information about their flights. Airlines are pioneers in terms of using the internet: online surveys, website usage, and loyalty program data in order to personalize their offers. In 2016, the air transport industries are widening their web presence further more in many areas: passenger customer relationship management (CRM) data- social media comments and requests-individual purchasing behavior- passenger mobile application interaction- smartphone sensor data. These implications will make interactions with passengers more relevant (Société International de Télécommunication Aèronautique, 2014b).

Currently, airlines airports are investing in business intelligence solutions in the next three years. 90% of airports are investing in information technology (IT) solutions. This fact is presented quantitatively in the table below (Société International de Télécommunication Aèronautique, 2014c).

**Table 2- Priority Investment in Business Intelligence**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Sales and Marketing</b>	<b>Operation Awareness</b>	<b>Passenger Experience</b>
<b>Airlines</b>	95%	88%	82%
<b>Airports</b>	74%	90%	85%

Source: (Société International de Télécommunication Aèronautique, 2014c)

Passengers drive the investment priorities in business intelligence for both airlines and airports. Travelers’ requirements are continuously shaping the future use of communication information technologies (ICT) in numerous areas that are primary related to their overall travel experience.

No doubt that social media sites can increasingly play a vital role in providing real-time travel information to air travelers. A number of social media priorities for airports are in the following:

- Comprehensive and effective mobile social media strategies are implemented with an aim to leverage revenue producing opportunities and develop passenger engagement.
- The use of social media for sending out real-time updates on departure/arrival status is very reliable for new age passengers.
- Many airports create social media microsites in order to offer more personalized communication by understanding specific needs of its various customer segments.
- Today, social media/web 2.0 is considered among the airport capabilities related to technological landscape and architecture.
- Social media along with baggage tracking and self-service kiosks is gaining momentum in the air transport industry.
- In the pre-arrival phase, social media is among a number of technologies [GPS based navigational systems-smartphone apps-radio frequency identification (RFID) - near field communication (NFC)] that assist passengers in their journey. Social media primary sends out real time updates on departure / arrival status of flights.

-At the departure phase, social networks offer special deals to passenger at the airport (Khan, 2011).

**Table 3-Airport Social Media Functions**

<b>Functions of social media</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Customer engagement</b>	With Social media, airports can now attract and engage passengers, with benefit of two-way conversations that enable easy sentiment-tracking and real-time feedback analysis, rather than one-way broadcasts
<b>Revenue generation</b>	Social media is a critical touch point for an airport when it wants to focus on strategies that generate value for its passengers, with an aim of increasing revenues
<b>Customer service delivery</b>	Sound social media strategy aid airports in recognizing the disconnection between passenger expectations and to discover opportunities for effective service delivery to passengers
<b>Access to information</b>	Passengers are smartly leveraging the power of social media by sharing real time updates on traffic, flights and airports; and also contribute by giving review on experience at an airport
<b>Personalized service</b>	Airports can take the advantage of social media to have personalized, value –rich conversations that address the specific concerns of its passengers

Source: Khan (2011)

Aside from communication oriented practices, social media is significantly very useful in numerous marketing-related areas, of which: -Seeking market feedback-promote airport services-Reward loyal passengers through contests and prizes-explore public opinions about airport performance-Foster brand awareness-Create Buzz / interesting content (Campbell, 2014).

International airports utilize social media to engage travelers, promote their airline partners and enhance concession revenue. A successful social media strategy is most often built on a solid brand foundation- one that clearly articulates the airport’s strategic differentiators and value to travelers. The interconnected relationship between airline and airport is enhanced by using social media as part of a cooperative marketing plan. It can be used to launch new routes, help lower the risk to the airline and to ensure the success of the new service to a specific community. Smart partnerships between airports and their partners can boost per-passenger spending while travelers are in the airport (Van Auken, 2015).

### **Facebook and the likeability of travel and tourism-related corporations**

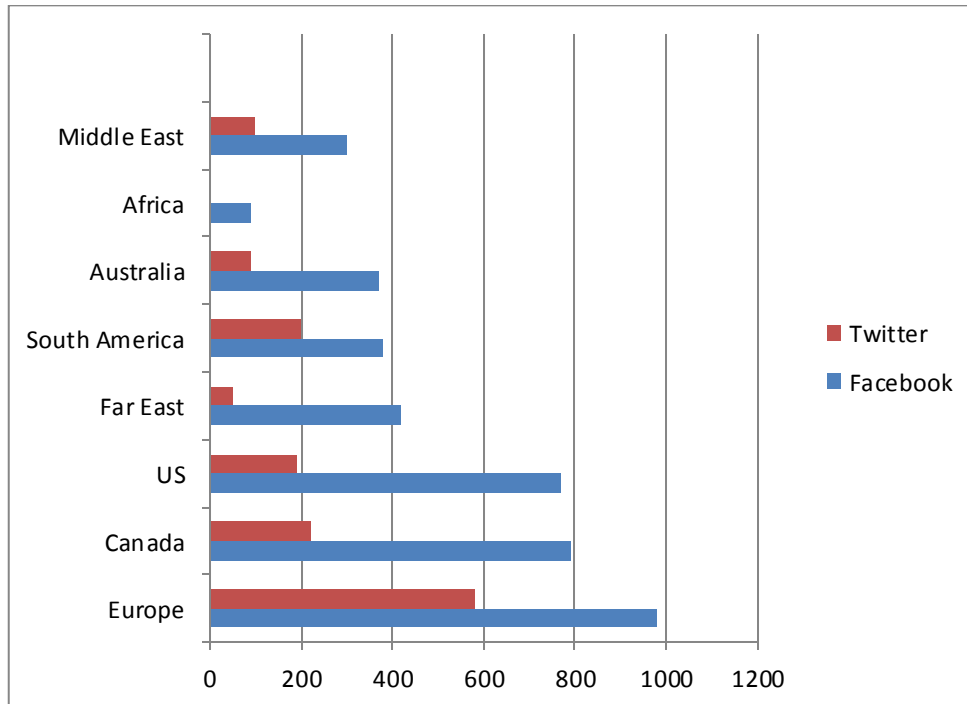
All corporations seek to investigate the concept of likeability and to understand how brands can make themselves more likeable. Marketers implicitly emphasize the importance of likeability in many areas such as advertising, customer experiences and consumer decision-making models such as the model of buyer readiness states and hierarchy of effects models. The question of ‘what is likeable?’ is very crucial in the business world. It is confirmed that corporations must focus on many elements (e.g. attractiveness, credibility, satisfaction) in order to answer this question (Nguyen, 2013). The like- feature on Facebook represents a way of expressing a positive attitude towards any kind of content on Facebook. Users can like postings, pictures, videos or comments as they can like entire Facebook pages as well as their content. All actions taken on Facebook are closely connected to the platform social graph for third-party information allowing Facebook to display actions that further allow more social influence. These characteristics give Facebook enormous potential regarding pace and impact on mass inter-personal persuasion more than any



other marketing tool in the world (Ganster, 2014). Airports are considered a very significant establishment in the travel and tourism industry. It is the gateway of the tourist destination and hence impacts immensely travelers’ first and last impressions. Travelers’ corporate likeability of the airport is therefore very influential, and social media is certainly a very crucial marketing tool in this area.

**The social media usage of Arab airports**

In the Arab world, the top used social media channel is Facebook (87%), followed respectively by WhatsApp (84%), YouTube (39%), Instagram (34%) and Twitter (32 %). Facebook is the top social media channel in ten Arab countries, namely: UAE, Qatar, Oman, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Egypt and Morocco. Facebook is no doubt the most influential social media platform in the Arab region (Arab Social Media Influencers Summit, 2015). However, Arab airports did not exploit the full potential of social media in their field. This is clear in the following figure which shows that Arab airports are not among the top social media users comparing to other regions of the world.



**Source: LeighFisher (2013)**

**Note: \* Latest available data**

**Figure 5 – World airport social media usage by area**

It’s also clear that a number of leading Arab airports have a very weak presence on social media sites. In only have Arab airport in terms of social media presence on all three major social media sites, other airport sites have a limited number of fans/ followers on the web. More research is needed in this area in order to raise awareness about the optimum social media marketing practices. Arab airports need to further increase their presence in this new marketing field.

**Table 4- The presence of major Arab Airports on major social media sites -2015**

Airport	Social Media Channel Metrics		
	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter
	Likes	Views	Followers
Dubai International	1,525,396	401,231	196,000
King Abdul-Aziz international Airport	6,958	N/A	N/A
Hamad International Airport	52,926	N/A	59,300
King Khalid International Airport	2,388	N/A	N/A
Abu Dhabi Airport	56,443	157,435	27,500
Cairo International	N/A	N/A	161
Kuwait International Airport	N/A	N/A	68
Sharjah International Airport	2,696	213	1,039
Muscat Airport	N/A	N/A	16
King Fahd International Airport	11,273	N/A	10,400

Note: N/A= not available

Source: Compiled from: Dubai International Airport (2015a), Dubai International Airport (2015b), Dubai International Airport (2015c) King Abdul Aziz International Airport (2015), Hamad International Airport (2015a), Hamad International Airport (2015b), King Khaled International Airport (2015), Abu Dhabi Airport (2015a). Abu Dhabi Airport (2015b). Abu Dhabi Airport (2015c). Cairo International Airport (2015), Kuwait International Airport (2015a), Kuwait International Airport (2015b) , Sharjah International Airport (2015a), Sharjah International Airport (2015b), Sharjah International Airport (2015c), Muscat Airport (2015). Bahrain International Airport (2015a), Bahrain International Airport (2015b).

Social mention is another metric that is used as a rating system for the selected airports. ‘Social Mention’ searches and compiles user-generated content from over 100 social media sites. It enables firms and individuals to monitor how many times they and others are mentioned, using a number of metrics including: strength (the number of times you are mentioned); sentiment (the ratio of mentions that are positive to those that are negative); passion (how often certain users talk about you); and reach (the number of different users talking about you divided by the total number of times you are mentioned) (Kietzmann, 2011).

**Table 5 -The social mention score of leading Arab airports - 2015**

Airport	Score			
	Strength	Sentiment *	Passion	Reach
Dubai International Airport	70%	11:1	33%	50%
King Abdul-Aziz International Airport	50%	9:1	30%	57%
Hamad International Airport	47%	29:1	31%	51%
King Khalid International Airport	44%	18:0	30%	58%
Abu Dhabi International Airport	34%	30:1	63%	15%
Cairo International Airport	44%	6:1	53%	24%
Kuwait International Airport	44%	21:1	74%	13%
Sharjah International Airport	37%	22:1	46%	28%
Muscat International Airport	46%	17:1	45%	37%
King Fahd International Airport	40%	21:1	37%	40%
<b>Average score</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>19:1</b>	<b>44.2</b>	<b>37.3</b>

Note: \*= Sentiment is the ratio of mentions that are generally positive to those that are generally negative

Source: Compiled from: Social mention (2015a), Social mention (2015b), Social mention (2015c), Social mention (2015d), Social mention (2015e), Social mention (2015f), Social mention (2015g), Social mention (2015h), Social mention (2015i), Social mention (2015j)

The above results of brand name mention (compiled from “Social mention”) also confirms that many leading Arab airports are not investing their resources sufficiently in online brand presence on social media sites. All average scores are below 50%. In terms of brand strength, it’s clear that all Arab airports achieved below average scores except the busiest Middle Eastern airport in the region: Dubai International Airport (70%). These results assure that further efforts should be made by managers to further amplify airports’ social media presence. The research seeks to find out whether the choice of message types can increase popularity of the selected sites. Arab Airport sites on Facebook were chosen to test the viability of this hypothesis.

## METHODOLOGY

This research analyses the Facebook messages posted by major Arab airports. The purpose of the research is to examine the most common marketing themes used by Arab airports on Facebook and further determine which type of marketing messages can achieve a high level of popularity among users (according to the level of likeability/ number of ‘likes’) and in which category they belong.

The content analysis approach relies upon finding measurable language behaviors on social media sites, based on the premise that human behavior in various environments is carried out mostly through linguistic means (Heering, 2010). Facebook is chosen given the fact that it is the top social media site in the airport industry (Simplifying, 2014b). The chosen sample of top Arab based airports are listed in table 6.

**Table 6- The Top Ten Arab Airports by Passenger Traffic-2015**

Rank	Airport	Passenger Traffic
1	Dubai International	78,010,265
2	Hamad International Airport	31,008,549
3	King Abdul-Aziz International Airport	29,010,429.
4	Abu Dhabi International Airport	23,293,022
5	Khalid International Airport	22,656,457
6	Cairo International Airport	14,969,000
7	Kuwait International Airport	11,269,029
8	Muscat International Airport	10,315,358
9	Sharjah International Airport	10,039,936
10	King Fahd International Airport	9,526,026

Note: Latest available data

Source: Airport Council International (2016)

The time frame of this research covers all textual Facebook messages posted on a sample of airport accounts starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2015. A content analysis was made using “Aquad v.7” as renowned computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Thus, the texts were imported into the application, where they were explored and categorized according to the following index (the three marketing-related categories include nine message types).

**Table 7- Categories of content by marketing message type**

Branding	Passenger Communication	Sales Promotion
Corporate image	Passenger experience	Tourism offers and discounts
Service product values	Holiday greetings	Contests , sweepstakes, quizzes and giveaways
Event Sponsorship	Customer care	
Celebrity Endorsements		

The marketing-related categories were first determined through a literature review in the area of airport social media marketing and their relevance to e-tourism, and then an extensive observation of several Arab airport accounts on Facebook helped refine the selection of categories and the message classification process. In addition, the number of “Likes” was registered for every post of the chosen sample in order to deduce both the “most popular messages” and “less popular messages” according to their respective marketing categories.

The study is guided by the following null hypothesis:

H 0: There is no significant difference in the level of user likeability among message types.

H0:  $\mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3 = \mu_4 \dots = \mu_9$

The alternative hypothesis is:

H1: There is a significant difference in the level of user likeability among various message types

The single factor ANOVA (analysis of variance) test is used to determine whether any of the differences between the means are statistically significant by comparing the p-value to the significance level in order to assess the null hypothesis (the null hypothesis states that the means are all equal). The research significance level is 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The SPSS v.22.0 was used to perform the test.

**RESULTS**

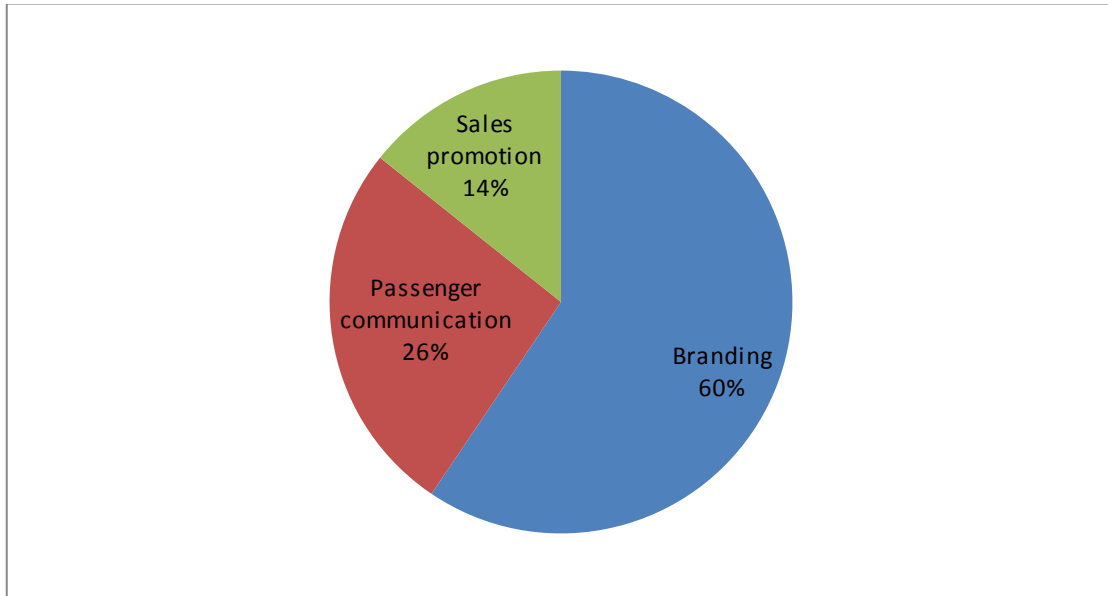
Descriptive statistics indicated that the sample data included 434 Facebook messages and 11619 words over the time frame of the conducted research (1<sup>st</sup> January-31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2015).

The text mining results generated by “Aquad” indicate that the indicative common marketing messages used among Arab airport sites on Facebook are ranked in the following table (the most posted message by site admins according to their type).

**Table 8-The ranking of commonly used indicative marketing messages by category \***

<b>Category</b>	<b>Message type (code)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
<b>Branding</b>	Corporate image	87	<b>2</b>
	Service product values	48	<b>4</b>
	Event Sponsorship	118	<b>1</b>
	Celebrity Endorsements	5	<b>9</b>
<b>Passenger Communication</b>	Passenger experience	32	<b>7</b>
	Holiday greetings	33	<b>6</b>
	Customer care	49	<b>3</b>
<b>Sales Promotion</b>	Tourism offers and discounts	17	<b>8</b>
	Contests , sweepstakes, quizzes and giveaways	45	<b>5</b>

**\* Results are generated by Aquad (CAQDAS)**



**Figure 6 – Percentage of posted marketing messages by category**

The previous results indicate that Facebook admins of Arab airports sites focus on the following common marketing themes to attract travel and tourism:

- 1-Event sponsorship
- 2-Corporate image
- 3-Customer care
- 4-Service product value
- 5-Contests, sweepstakes, quizzes and giveaways
- 6- Holiday greetings
- 7- Passenger experience
- 8- Tourism offers and discounts
- 9- Celebrity Endorsements

The text analysis of Facebook messages indicate that branding (60%) is the primary marketing theme present among major Arab airport sites followed by passenger communication (26%) and sales promotion (14%).

The ANOVA test was conducted in order to test the viability of the null hypothesis. Table 9 shows the summary of results generated by the SPSS analysis.

**Table 9- ANOVA test summary according to the level of likeability (number of Likes)\***

Message Types	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Corporate image	87	38338	440.6667	3392793
Service product values	48	16663	347.1458	469321.3
Event Sponsorship	118	7176	60.81356	16710.92
Celebrity Endorsements	5	5025	1005	484659.5
Passenger experience	32	35701	1115.656	16504921
Holiday greetings	33	7477	226.5758	151293.9
Customer care	49	6906	140.9388	110572.2
Tourism offers and discounts	17	10092	593.6471	568590.5
Contests , sweepstakes, quizzes and giveaways	45	10274	228.3111	624031.1

\*Number of likes per message type

**Table 10-** ANOVA test results

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit.
Between Groups	35340367	8	4417546	2.143	0.030897	1.960192
Within Groups	8.76E+08	425	2061384			
Total	9.11E+08	433				

It's confirmed from the ANOVA test results that the  $F > F \text{ crit.}$  ( $2.143 > 1.960192$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This test result confirms that the means of the indicative marketing message types are not all equal. The alternative hypothesis is therefore accepted: There is a significant difference in the level of user likeability among various message types.

This means that the choice of message type can influence the number of likes the post receives from users.

**Table 11- Indicative message types by mean average according to the level of likeability / number of Likes**

Message type	Mean Average	Standard deviation	Ranking
Corporate image	440.6667	1841.954	3
Service product values	347.1458	685.0703	5
Event Sponsorship	60.81356	129.2707	9
Celebrity Endorsements	1005	696.1749	2
Passenger experience	1115.656	4062.625	1
Holiday greetings	226.5758	388.9651	7
Customer care	140.9388	332.524	8
Tourism offers and discounts	593.6471	754.0494	4
Contests , sweepstakes, quizzes and giveaways	228.3111	789.9564	6

Table 11 indicates the ranking of message types according to user likeability (popularity): 1- passenger experience 2-celebrity endorsements 3-corporate image 4-offers and discounts 5-service product values 6-contests, sweepstakes, quizzes and giveaways 7-holiday greetings 8-customer care 9-event sponsorship.

When comparing between table- and table 8 and 11, it's clear that Arab airport sites should refine their approach towards the selection of message types according the level of likeability among users. For example, although the event sponsorship theme is the top marketing theme present on Arab airport sites, it is the least popular message type among user according to the level of likeability. The same case applies to celebrity endorsements and offers & discounts. It's clear that passenger experience posts are the most popular/highly likeable message type among users.

## CONCLUSIONS

The presence of Arab Airports on social media (which is justified by various social media measures and the brand magnitude results) is relatively mediocre. More effort is needed to amplify the social media marketing activities of leading Arab airports in this area. The top five most popular message types are: 1- Passenger experience 2-Celebrity endorsements 3-Corporate images 4- Tourism offers and discounts 5- Service product values. These types of messages were proven capable of generating a significant level of likeability among users. Therefore they are fundamental marketing themes for Arab airports in attracting travel and tourism.

Arab airport sites should improve their approach towards the selection of message types according the level of likeability among users. For example, although the event sponsorship theme is the top marketing theme present on Arab airport sites, it is the least popular message type among user according to the level of likeability. The same case applies to celebrity endorsements and offers & discounts. It's clear that passenger experience posts are the most popular/highly likeable message type among users.

Content analysis can help airport authorities optimize their future marketing efforts on Facebook and expand their fan base/ likeability performance and hence achieve a higher level of engagement among users through better message design. This will positively affect their social media marketing performance on the selected sites and therefore attract more travelers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

-The research findings confirm that airport managers can improve their corporate likeability on Facebook by focusing on designing and posting the most popular message types on their respective sites. This approach will help site admins to further expand their fan base among travelers and tourists, and grow their level of likeability/ popularity, and therefore optimize the effectiveness of their marketing messages. The most popular message types should coincide with the most common marketing themes used on Facebook accounts. These efforts should be strongly correlated with the amplification of their marketing content on major social media sites.

-Drawing from the research findings, Arab airports can spread their social media messages among Facebook users by engaging users with themes related to their tourism experience at the airport and the air travel journey as a whole. Consequently, Arab airports also need to evaluate the overall effects of Facebook on sales and the effectiveness of marketing campaigns by revising the level of likeability of their messages and offers.

-A more defined typology of Facebook messages would assist airport marketing managers in developing more specific social media strategies to effectively communicate with Facebook users. Finally, this study also provides a foundation for automatic analysis using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Future studies can build on these research findings in training marketing teams to automatically separate social media messages according to a predefined categorization. A reliable automatic text classifier can help site admins to assess and monitor the effectiveness of the messages sent on Facebook in real time and hence continuously optimize the performance level.



-Every corporation seeking to enhance its reputation on social media must choose appropriate metrics for measuring the community's social engagement (e.g. number of fans-number of followers-number of views) according to the selected medium.

### FUTURE RESEARCH

The use of social media by airports is still in the rise, especially in the Middle East region. Generally speaking, the use of social media by travel-related corporations is considered a newly rising trend that needs more research for various enterprises and in different geographical areas; given in consideration the cultural and social dispersion among different management cultures. Recent research efforts focused on the use of airport social media in specific regions, such as Europe and the US. In the Middle East, further research is needed in this area.

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## تحليل المحتوى التسويقي لمواقع التواصل الاجتماعي للمطارات العربية الرائدة

### الملخص العربي

يلقى البحث الضوء على أهمية مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي في تسويق خدمات المطارات على موقع "فيسبوك" - كأداة ترويجية رائدة في هذا المجال. تم تحليل المحتوى التسويقي لحسابات المطارات الرائدة على "فيسبوك" من أجل اكتشاف أكثر الرسائل التسويقية المستخدمة على المواقع المختارة. يهدف البحث بشكل رئيسي إلى إيجاد طرق لرفع مستوى شعبية مواقع المطارات العربية على "فيسبوك" من خلال اقتراح نوعية محددة من الرسائل التسويقية تضمن مستوى مرتفعاً من الإعجاب والمشاركة من قبل المسافرين والسياح على المواقع محل الدراسة. النتائج الرئيسية للبحث تؤكد على إمكانية تحسين شعبية المطارات العربية العظمى من خلال تصميم و عرض مجموعة محددة من الرسائل التسويقية عبر مواقعهم على "فيسبوك". استخلص البحث تصنيفات وأنواعاً محددة من الرسائل التسويقية التي تحقق هذا الغرض من خلال استخدام برنامج إحصائي لتحليل المحتوى.

**الكلمات الدالة:** تسويق المطارات - تحليل المحتوى - الإعجاب بالشركات - أنواع الرسائل التسويقية - مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي