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## **Social media management, objectification and measurement in an emerging market**

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**Abstract:** Emerging markets are a crucial driver of brand growth, social media a fundamental part of brand strategy and effective use viewed as instrumental to market success. Therefore, this study explores how managers objectify and measure social media within an emerging market. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with social media managers across a range of companies and thematically analysed in terms of the types, objectives, measures, tools, and resultant satisfaction. Thematic analysis revealed four types of objective as brand, engagement, relationship, and conversion, which resembled a traditional marketing funnel and several subsequent measures and tools. However, singular analysis revealed emerging marketers were lagging behind their developed counterparts. Emerging marketers used unsuitable metrics, single rather than multiple metrics, as well as a complete lack of financial metrics against objectives, whilst only one agent was using all elements of the marketing funnel. Clear practical implications are highlighted in order to better manage and measure social media within emerging markets.

**Keywords:** social media; social media objectives; social media measurement; social media metrics; social media return on investment.

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## 1 Introduction

Social media penetration has proliferated globally, particularly in emerging economies (Gong et al., 2014; Enikolopov et al., 2018). With the development of digital technologies, the internet and social media are also changing consumer behaviour and marketing practices in parallel. Over half the world's population are today internet users – approximately 2.77 billion – of which approximately 71% use social media (Statista, 2019). This has led to changes in social media use by firms to reach their customers as consumption decisions are increasingly socially-based (Tamošiūnaitė and Karlaitė, 2015). Thus, social media marketing has become an integral part of any marketing strategy (Hanna et al., 2011; Hussein and Mahrous, 2016; Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Rutter et al., 2016) with, for example, approximately 65 million business Facebook pages created (Chaykowski, 2017).

Objectives of social media marketing are complex and changing. Within this vein, organisations use both traditional and new media to achieve objectives, such as increased brand awareness and recall, changes in brand image and attitudinal beliefs and to influence purchase and repurchase behaviour through increasing loyalty. In 2019, marketers will spend just over half of their budgets on digital media surpassing the halfway mark for the first time (Sterling, 2018). As social media has become more prevalent, other key objectives have also become more important, such as interaction, conversation, sharing, collaboration, engagement, evangelism, also being used to achieve diverse strategic objectives, but with more of a 'human touch' (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011).

In order to measure changing and increasingly complex objectives, a myth has arisen that the internet allows for easy measurement. The reality is that marketers often fall into a trap of 'counting' rather than 'measuring' (Flores, 2016). This is because measuring involves defining clear objectives, identifying the appropriate metrics, and evaluating

objective achievement (Järvinen and Karjaluoto, 2015). From this perspective, Chan and Guillet (2011) argue a gap in the social media marketing performance literature is that measures are in fact inadequate (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). Along these lines, a report by eMarketer (2012) found that social media marketers are not satisfied with available metrics for evaluating social media performance.

Increasingly, there is a move to measure financial return on expenditure using social media platforms. Given the many challenges marketers have when managing their brands on social media (Gensler et al., 2013), new questions are emerging as to the best way of measuring social media activity, reporting return on capital employed (Gilfoil and Jobs, 2012) and the relationship between social media and economic performance (Culnan et al., 2010; Paniagua and Sapena, 2014). These questions developed from marketers' need to rely on relevant metrics to measure and control social media marketing activities. By measuring social media objective achievement and related ROI, companies can produce insights that allow tweaks and improvements to their strategies (Misirlis and Vlachopoulou, 2018). Within this context, marketers can justify social media expenditure in a more objective fashion in order to get buy in from decision makers (Luo and Zhang, 2013; Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011).

Stelzner (2019) recently reported that only four in ten managers declare being able to measure their social media objectives effectively and in specific terms of ROI. Despite a search for 'measuring social media ROI' returning more than 112 million results on Google, essentially all from practitioners, and despite this abundance of information, organisations are struggling to effectively measure social media objectives (Dawley and Aynsley, 2018; Barnhart, 2017). Especially in financial terms (Kizildag et al., 2017; Michopoulou and Moisa, 2019), which academic literature has largely ignored, despite being identified as a priority for research with tracking return being a top concern (Fan and Gordon, 2014). Hence, research into digital marketing performance is underdeveloped (Järvinen and Karjaluoto, 2015) resulting in key questions, such as those proposed by MSI (2018) – "what key performance indices/metrics should be measured and how?"

Emerging economies play an important role in leading brand development and have led social media penetration (Godey et al., 2016), which has reached saturation point in some emerging economies. Whilst a limited amount of literature has concentrated on developed economies, it has neglected emerging (Borker, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to the literature on social media drivers and measurement in an emerging economy context, by exploring how marketers objectify and measure social media and return on investment, and their resultant satisfaction. To achieve this goal, the research questions are threefold:

- 1 What are the social media objectives in an emerging economy?
- 2 What are the measures of social media objectives in an emerging economy?
- 3 How do social media marketing managers relate outcomes and return on investment in an emerging economy?

This research paper begins with a literature review in the area of social media measurement and metrics. The next section formulates a data collection and analysis methodology to empirically investigate current practices within an emerging market context. The results are then analysed and discussed in relation to previous studies.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the key findings, practical implications, and limitations of the research.

## 2 Literature review

Social media is a web and is increasingly more mobile forming interactive social platforms of predominantly consumer and brand generated content (Kumar et al., 2016). Users can create, share, modify and discuss using different types of platforms (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), which today include social networks (e.g., Facebook), professional networks (e.g., LinkedIn), web logs (otherwise known as blogs, e.g., WordPress), micro blogs (e.g., Twitter), video sharing networks (e.g., YouTube) and other platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, etc.). Social media management is the process of designing a programme of creation, timings, analysis, and engagement with content posted on social media platforms to meet business objectives.

In particular, social media plays a significant role in achieving the communication objectives for a brand (Owyang et al., 2009) and represents an increasing proportion of the advertising spend (Sterling, 2018). Social media, in all its forms, is no longer an afterthought for marketers as it was a few short years ago (Eyrich et al., 2008). Social media is now viewed as a credible brand building vehicle which can be leveraged to enhance the reputation of a brand (Kietzmann et al., 2011). With the emphasis on digital media for advertising spending in some developed markets exceeding the spending on traditional media, social media is an important way to enhance reach and meet other communication objectives. However, brand managers seem to struggle with social media activation to drive positive results (Hanna et al., 2011).

Recognising the benefits of social media, the debate around investment and management have become increasingly significant (Fisher, 2009; Ashley and Tuten, 2015) and it is necessary to design objectives and specific metrics for tracking outcomes on social media. To achieve this, Murdough (2009) proposes a continuous management and measurement process of five stages:

- 1 *scope*: clarify what is trying to be accomplished
- 2 *define*: creating an outline of how social platforms could be leveraged to reach and interact with a brand's target audience to support the objectives
- 3 *design*: lay out specific tactics and venues most appropriate for a brand's active social media presence
- 4 *implementation*: ensuring that what is being seen and transpiring in social venues is what is expected, in terms of content, editorial calendars, work flow management, brand voice consistency, and so forth
- 5 *measure*: reporting and insight to evaluate the social program performance against the determined KPI metrics.

However, as the number of metrics available has increased, they are often not being utilised effectively by marketers (Tuten and Solomon, 2017).

### *2.1 Social media metrics*

Straub et al. (2002) explain during the earliest stages of social media, metrics were vital to practitioners, for example the number of views (known as a ‘hit’ counter) as an early indicator of blog popularity. As platforms progressed there was increasing need for instruments which could be used to measure different aspects of social media interaction and impact. Hoffman and Fodor (2010) explain that metrics such as: number of followers, likes and engagement based on ‘reach and frequency’ are now commonplace and many managers use the free built-in analytical tools that are provided by the social media platforms (McCann and Barlow, 2015; Cray, 2012; Hoffman and Fodor, 2010).

Järvinen and Karjaluoto (2015) call for specific metrics going beyond web analytics in terms of the reach of social media and argue more is needed to quantify social media. Research has thus sought to classify social media metrics, for example, Spiller and Tuten (2015) classify metrics as activity, interaction, and financial. The non-financial metrics measure achievement of different social media performance objectives, for example: awareness, engagement and word-of-mouth on different social media platforms (Flores, 2016; Hoffman and Fodor, 2010).

However, some observers argue these quantitative metrics are not enough to appreciate the real value of social media and a qualitative approach is more suitable (Fisher, 2009). Consequently, an investment in social media to enhance performance and value creation for businesses which may include influencing attitudes and influencing intention (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). Alternatively, this may include activities related to customer service on social media to generate value by increasing customer satisfaction (Culnan et al., 2010). Further, it is difficult to relate social media activity directly to sales (McCann and Barlow, 2015) with the complexity of social media platforms, interaction, and different steps in purchasing process, distorting metrics with measurement error.

Hoffman and Fodor (2010) go further, suggesting a new measurement approach by inverting traditional measurement of return on investment. Instead of investing and calculating the return according to customer response, managers should first calculate the investment customers make when engaging with the brand on social media. Similarly Gilfoil and Jobs (2012) explain ‘unit of analysis’ is more important and financial aspects should be calculated second, in order to calculate better return measures.

### *2.2 Social media effectiveness and subjectivity*

As indicated above, the literature has two measurement streams, namely financial vs. non-financial which include qualitative and quantitative type metrics. Social media effectiveness, therefore, tends to be measured through a combination of financial and non-financial (Blanchard, 2011) metrics dependent on the objectives. To help managers make choices, Hoffman and Fodor (2010) classify social media options through a framework according to their ability to measure effectiveness (as fuzzy versus quantifiable) and the subjective evaluation (as failing or succeeding) resulting in four options (measure & adjust, iterate for success, dead end, naïve optimism). This classification facilitates understanding of social media effectiveness and helps strategy revision, however, is greatly skewed towards quantitative type metrics.

In compromise, Nair (2011) suggests using a ‘balanced scorecard’ which involves selecting non-financial measures, linked to financial measures in order to monitor, manage and measure social media. In other words, financial metrics need to be

complemented with non-financial metrics due to social media marketing complexity (Buhalis and Mamalakis, 2015). Such a combination between financial and non-financial metrics leads to the design of a more effective performance measurement system (Keong Choong, 2013), however, the system is only as good as the data collection and data analysis methods employed (Sidorova and Agostino, 2016)

Given the number and availability of social media metrics, it may be surprising that resistance to measure and measurement ineffectiveness are commonplace. Fisher (2009) attempted to classify social media managers into three categories:

- 1 *deniers*: who are resistant to measure social media eventually because past attempts were unsuccessful
- 2 *definers*: who comply with the new metrics and measure social media with basic quantitative and qualitative metrics
- 3 *dedicated*: who realise the importance of using every available system of measurement to build a 360-degree picture of people's reactions to and interactions with a brand.

### 2.3 *Social media expenditure and financial ROI*

While there are financial and non-financial ways to assess social media effectiveness, the financial analysis of social media is problematic and multifaceted (Cronin, 2014). However, managers capable of measuring financial outcomes on social media and demonstrating its contribution to business objectives have increased their influence in the company (Järvinen and Karjaluoto, 2015). In its simplest form, Gilfoil and Jobs (2012) suggest using a sales funnel with social media activities at the top and conversion at the bottom. Thus, managers can estimate sales emanating from social media and even attempt to calculate the 'lifetime value' of customers (Duboff and Wilkerson, 2010).

Kumar and Mirchandani (2012) and Kumar et al. (2013), mention a lack of robust methodologies to measure the impact of social media efforts in financial terms. To address these issues, frameworks have been developed based on the customer influence effect (CIE), customer influence value (CIV) and stickiness index (SI), in addition to the customer lifetime value (CLV) to address this issue. In line with these indicators, Weinberg and Berger (2011) introduce the connected customer lifetime value (CCLV) along with customer social media value (CSMV). However, observers note the difficulties of measuring social media impact on direct sales (Wozniak et al., 2016), such as financial ROI, persist.

The reviewed literature concentrates almost exclusively on developed countries. In contrast, there is less known in the emerging economy context yet many opportunities for growth exist. From a practical perspective, marketing measurement within emerging markets has been identified as a make-or-break issue for brands (Burgess and Steenkamp, 2013). Still, the background of managers, the competitive environment and the digital ecosystem in developing markets vary from those in developed. Therefore, this research is positioned at a unique and understudied intersection of these differences for emerging economies to provide theoretical and practical insight into the issues surrounding social media management and measurement.

### 3 Methodology

The objective of this research is to explore how marketing managers from emerging economies set goals and measure their use of social media. A qualitative research method was selected as most appropriate (Thiétart, 2014) to develop understanding of processes organisations follow to create objectives, measure social media activity, the challenges they face and the level of satisfaction toward the metrics.

#### 3.1 Sample selection

The Algerian market was selected as a suitable emerging economy which has relatively high levels of social media penetration and uptake from marketers (Hadj-Moussa, 2003; Laifa, 2018) and represented other emerging economies (Tiliouine et al., 2006), whilst also having good access to key stakeholders in charge of social media. The sample of marketers was chosen based on purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2018) by selecting those organisations that were active on social media to produce answers with varied opinions on social media measurement.

A search was made on a well-known professional social network for a range of marketing job positions for companies in Algeria. Next, manual checks were made for each company to ensure they were in fact working for an organisation active on social media. A list of possible participants was compiled and they were sent an explanation letter with a request for their participation. Diversity of both respondents' profiles (gender, age, and experience) and contexts (industry, agency, client, and company size) was prioritised with the resulting sample of interviewees reported in Table 1.

**Table 1** An overview of the sample (interviewee profiles)

	<i>Job title</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Size (employees)</i>	<i>Digital team</i>	<i>Experience (years)</i>
1	Marketing consultant	Male	Consulting	1	1	17
2	Digital and media director	Male	Agency	256	12	7
3	Communication manager	Female	FMCG	18,000	2	5
4	Digital manager	Male	Technology	3,300	5	7
5	Marketing manager	Male	Fashion retail	300	3	10
6	Digital strategist	Female	Agency	15	3	4
7	CRM manager	Female	Technology	500	12	4
8	Marketing manager	Male	Technology	110	3	3
9	Digital manager	Female	Pharmaceutical	3,000	5	4
10	Web marketer	Male	Motorcycles	60	1	2

Qualitative techniques are well suited to exploratory studies (Paré, 2004) and encouraged in order to uncover new constructs within emerging markets (Burgess and Steenkamp, 2006) as a tool to enrich existing theories in developed countries (Sheth, 2011). Research on this topic is limited in an emerging market like Algeria, therefore, interviews were selected as a suitable tool and conducted in order to explore how marketers were using social media.

**Table 2** Table highlighting the Interview guideline and literature

<i>Area</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Literature</i>
Current practices of social media objectives measurement	1 How do you use social media?	Michopoulou and Moisa (2019), Sidorova and Agostino (2016), Buhalis and Mamalakis (2015), Järvinen and Karjaluo (2015), McCann and Barlow (2015), Peters et al. (2013), Cray (2012), Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), Hoffman and Fodor (2010) and Murdough (2009)
	2 What are the business objectives when using social media?	
	3 What are the benefits of using social media?	
	4 How do you measure the results of social media?	
	5 Why these specific metrics?	
	6 What is the most important metric when measuring results?	
	7 Are there certain tools involved? If yes, which?	
Challenges of social media objective measurement	1 What are the risks when measuring social media?	Buhalis and Mamalakis (2015), Järvinen and Karjaluo (2015), Peters et al. (2013), Gilfoil and Jobs (2012), Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), Duboff and Wilkerson (2010), Hoffman and Fodor (2010) and Fisher (2009)
	2 What is the most challenging thing in social media measurement?	
	3 How is management involved in social media measurement?	
	4 Do you have any conflict with management in justifying social media investment?	
	5 How has social media measurement evolved and where is it going?	
	6 Do you have specific process to collect data for measuring social media ROI?	
Satisfaction toward actual social media measurement	1 What sort of results do you typically expect from social media?	Stelzner (2019), Järvinen and Karjaluo (2015), eMarketer (2012), Duboff and Wilkerson (2010) and Fisher (2009)
	2 Can you measure all your objectives with the actual metrics?	
	3 If not, what objectives can't you measure?	
	4 Does the actual metrics meet your needs for measurement?	
	5 Would you rate, from 1 to 5, your overall satisfaction with social media measurement metrics?	

### 3.2 Data collection

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in each of the sampled organisations, as it allowed essential information to be obtained while providing an opportunity to probe issues specific to each organisation (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003). An interview guide was developed based on the literature with questions focused on the research questions (Table 2). Each interview began with general queries about the interviewee (i.e., job position, experience, company, etc.) followed by questions regarding social media objectives, measurement, challenges, and satisfaction.



Where possible, managers were interviewed in person, although in some cases interviews were conducted online (via Skype.) The interviews were conducted during the period between 10th July and 8th September 2018. Given the time accorded by respondents, interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes. Participants remain anonymous. The interviews were conducted in French which is the most common language used by professional marketing managers in the country.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterned meanings across a set of data specifically collected for the research purpose (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and was used in this study. The interviews were recorded with permission and each interview was transcribed and translated into English. Once the data had been initially coded, collated codes were analysed and arranged into potential themes. Themes were then refined to ensure that they reflected both, the coded extracts and the full dataset of all interviews, to understand the phenomena of social media objectives and measurement within the context of an emerging economy. Finally, satisfaction was calculated over the sample for the subsequent themes, objectives, measures, and tools used. The results of this analysis are presented and discussed in the subsequent sections.

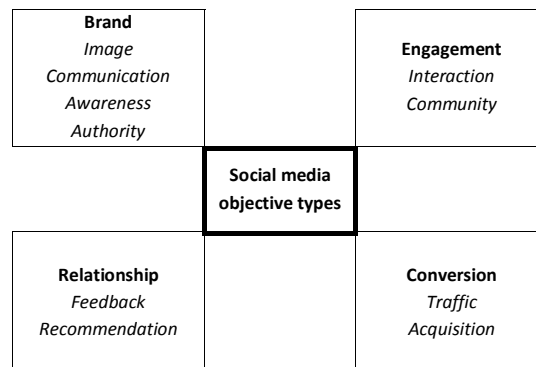
## 4 Analysis and findings

The analysis discussion is presented in three areas beginning with the thematic analysis of the key objectives. The next section links the measures and tools for these objectives. The final section identifies the most common tools used by social media markets and highlights their satisfaction with them.

### 4.1 Types and objectives

First, the thematic analysis identified the overriding types of objectives based on the interviews, which included: branding, engagement, relationship and conversion. The four themes depicted in Figure 1 and highlight the ten sub-themes discussed below.

**Figure 1** Highlighting the key types of objectives identified



*Theme one – brand objectives*

Branding was identified as a key theme among interviewees with sub-themes identified as *image*, *awareness*, *communication*, and *authority*. Branding as a priority was very clear from the outset of the interview process and as one interviewee explained:

“My first objective is branding.” [Interview 1]

However, whilst some interviewees explained brand as the objective, probing revealed that actual objectives were more concerned with specific branding issues including *brand image*, *awareness* and *recognition* with the return being *increased authority* of the brand within an emerging market, highlighted in Table 3.

**Table 3** Highlighting social media marketing and types of brand objectives

<i>Brand objectives</i>	<i>Interviewee comments</i>
Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In my department, we do exclusively institutional communication, so our goals are image objectives. The idea is to enhance the image of the group and its founder, it has direct repercussions on our reputation...” [Interview 3]</li> </ul>
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A Facebook post or Tweet can have more impact [on awareness] than an event or a front page of a newspaper.” [Interview 3]</li> <li>• “As an agency we want to make our clients [which are brands] known...” [Interview 2]</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Our goal as a brand [agency name] is to highlight the work we do for our customers and to share the work atmosphere.” [Interview 2]</li> <li>• “To communicate about our different brands and the products we sell.” [Interview 5]</li> </ul>
Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I mean, being a recognized authority before attacking the market.” [Interview 1]</li> </ul>

*Theme two – engagement*

The next type of objective was aimed at increasing the level of engagement with (and between) customers. In fact, one interviewee listed it as the second highest priority:

“... second, to engage with our customers...” and “the challenge is to expand our community and keep a high level of engagement” [Interview 10]

This appeared to entail social media as a tool to build community around the brand and to ‘humanise’ the business online presence. Once the community was established, social media could then be used to stimulate within and increase reach outside of the community to increase positive interaction, highlighted in Table 4.

**Table 4** Highlighting social media engagement type objectives

<i>Engagement objectives</i>	<i>Interviewee comments</i>
Stimulate interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We expect reactivity from our customers...” [Interview 8]</li> <li>• “Influence, notoriety and interactions.” [Interview 6]</li> <li>• “...the number of interactions, reach, number of new followers.” [Interview 6]</li> </ul>

**Table 4** Highlighting social media engagement type objectives (continued)

<i>Engagement objectives</i>	<i>Interviewee comments</i>
Build a community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The challenge is to expand our community.” [Interview 10]</li> <li>• “For our agency, it is important to build a community... each one has his own vision about digital management. For me, it’s mostly about humans. Although it is connected, it’s also a story of feeling.” [Interview 6]</li> </ul>

### *Theme three – relationships*

Branding and engagement objectives ultimately led to nurturing relationships with consumers, perhaps as a pre-conversion tool. For example, one interviewee explained that social media was actually:

“Relationship marketing, information sharing, and so on...” [Interview 9]

This consisted of two main sub-themes of reducing the barriers to customer feedback and to be used as a channel to listen to customers and in identifying their problems as an opportunity to solve and improve. This could be to stimulate recommendations and in effect turn a negative customer complaint which was successfully resolved into a positive and good customer service. Excerpts highlighted in Table 5.

**Table 5** Highlighting relationship marketing and types of customer objectives

<i>Relationship objectives</i>	<i>Interviewee comments</i>
Customer feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “... understand their [customers] problems with our products and even test their reactions when launching new products.” [Interview 10]</li> <li>• “... as a customer listening channel, we would call it a second call-centre.” [Interview 4]</li> </ul>
Stimulate customer recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “... we are on social media because we expect... that our shop and products will be recommended.” [Interview 8]</li> <li>• “Reactivity, conversion [through] recommendation.” [Interview 8]</li> </ul>

### *Theme four – conversions*

Ultimately participants highlighted the importance of converting social media users into customers and to ensure the right demographic of social media user was being targeted:

“A social media campaign for a specific product is converting targeted population into customers in the stores.” [Interview 5] and “we took the decision to launch a Facebook fan page... to convert social media followers into showroom visitors...” [Interview 10]

Sub-themes were identified as driving *targeted traffic* to their own platform, which could facilitate *customer acquisition*. Ensuring that social media can facilitate this process of ‘conversion’ efficiently. Planning was crucial to success in terms of defining the correct target customer to ensure efficiency of acquisition and in turn and optimal conversion, excerpts highlighted in Table 6.

**Table 6** Highlighting conversion objective types of customer acquisitions

<i>Conversion objectives</i>	<i>Interviewee comments</i>
Customer acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “... and of course, acquiring customers for my on-demand services.” [Interview 1]</li> <li>• “Every media must have the ultimate goal of converting prospects into consumers.” [Interview 2]</li> </ul>
Targeted traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The digital media buyer, which defines the target, plans the ADS campaign.” [Interview 2]</li> <li>• “Develop platforms that keep it in direct contact with its target [audience].” [Interview 5]</li> </ul>

#### 4.2 *Measurement and tools vs. satisfaction*

Whilst thematic analysis identified types and objectives to draw relationships among the interviews, the interviewees were also explicitly asked about their objective measurements and their resulting satisfaction with them. The combination of measures was aggregated, and satisfaction calculated for each over all interviews, shown in Table 6.

This process highlighted discrepancies between what an interviewee thought they were measuring versus what they were actually measuring. The reporting also highlighted inconsistency among consistency between interviewees. For example, whilst four explicitly used community size and number of interactions as a measure of engagement, three interviewees mentioned engagement as the measure, when they too were measuring number of interactions. Along similar lines, another two interviewees mentioned interaction as an objective, but not as a measure. Overall, the most common measure (five of the ten) was unsurprisingly the number of conversions, indicating that a quantitative measure in terms of money spent on social media vs. the number of direct sales could in fact be measured. Both highest combinations of satisfaction measures (5 out of 5) included conversions and at least one other measure. Incidentally, all interviewees were probed about their use of financial measures with the result being that none were used. Surprisingly, this did not seem to be an issue with management to justify social media expenditure.

**Table 7** Highlighting key ‘explicit’ measures and satisfaction

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Usage of measures</i>										$\mu$	
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>		
Lead generation	✓											3
Views/hits		✓										4
Likes, comments, sharing			✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	4
Conversions				✓	✓		✓				✓	4
Comments analysis					✓							3
Community size			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		4
Reach		✓	✓			✓					✓	4
Satisfaction (from 5)	3	4	3	5	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	-

In order to facilitate the mass measurement of the objectives, it would be typical to use a tool in order to combine different data that could be used to aid decision making. Each interviewee was explicitly asked which tools they used, shown in Table 8, with all except one mentioning a company/platform.

**Table 8** Highlighting the usage of measurement tools (all platforms)

Platform	Usage of platform										$\mu$	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Google Analytics	✓						✓	✓				3.6
Facebook Insights	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		3.7
Agora pulse				✓								5
SocialBakers (free)		✓			✓	✓	✓					3.5
Track Maven					✓							3
Social shaker				✓								5
Sprinklr					✓							3
Sales force marketing cloud							✓					4
Social studio							✓					4
Satisfaction (from 5)	3	4	3	5	3	3	4	4	4	5		-

The smallest platforms showed the highest level of measurement satisfaction, however, only one interviewee used those measures. The larger tools, such as Google Analytics and Facebook Insights had some of the lowest satisfaction levels. Perhaps, a reason for this dissatisfaction was that the free tools only provide general data allowing for basic measurement. Moreover, Google Analytics may seem to be a simple tool, but needs advanced setup to get relevant dashboards to generate more insight.

### 4.3 Objective, measurement and tool vs. satisfaction

The themes identified in Section 4.1 and measures and tools identified in Section 4.2 were then linked; the tools (all mentioned platforms) were identified for the types of objectives and measures. The high-level overview is shown in Table 9.

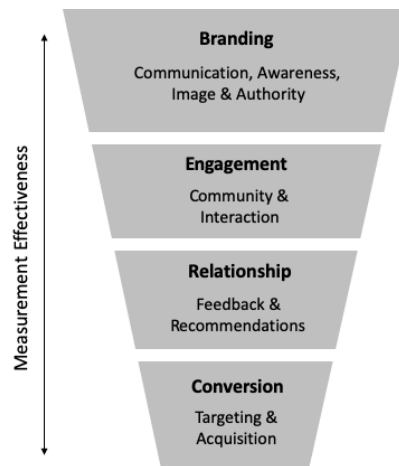
Whilst the types of objectives of branding, engagement, relationship, and conversion were significant, it was clear that branding objectives were ‘fuzziest’ and not particularly well measured; perhaps following general trends in how brands use social media (difficult to calculate ROI). Also, there was a clear discrepancy between measures and objectives. For example, engagement was discussed as being a type, objective, and measure and, therefore, ‘fuzzy’ and not well defined with brand recall being both an objective and measure. There was also discrepancy between terminologies as differing objectives when they were also being measured in the same way. For example, reactions vs. interactions and reach vs. virality. Managers often had measures which did not always match the objectives. For example, community size as a measure of awareness, whilst others spoke about awareness without talking about community size and vice versa. It appeared that managers may have used some measures simply because they were available and understood, not because they are linked to objectives.

**Table 9** Highlighting aggregated objectives, measures, and tools

Type	Objective	Measure	Platform
Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10)</li> <li>• Communication (2, 3, 5, 8, 9)</li> <li>• Build image (3)</li> <li>• Authority (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand recall (1<sup>1</sup>, 10)</li> <li>• Size of community (3, 6, 8, 9, 10)</li> <li>• Reach (2, 3<sup>2</sup>, 6, 10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agora pulse (4)</li> <li>• Social shaker (4)</li> </ul>
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build community (6)</li> <li>• Increase interactions (6, 8<sup>5</sup>, 10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour (6)</li> <li>• Number of likes, comments, sharing (1, 4, 5, 6, 10)</li> <li>• View rate (2)</li> <li>• Community growth (6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SocialBakers (2, 5, 6, 7)</li> <li>• Track Maven (5)</li> <li>• Sprinklr (5)</li> <li>• Facebook Insights<sup>6</sup> (1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10)</li> </ul>
Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to feedback (4, 6)</li> <li>• Stimulate customer recommendations (8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resolved complaints (4)</li> <li>• Comment/sentiment analysis (5, 6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sprinklr<sup>4</sup> (5)</li> </ul>
Conversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer acquisition (1, 7)</li> <li>• Targeted traffic (2, 5, 10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of leads (1, 7)</li> <li>• Hits/clicks (1)</li> <li>• Incremental sales (6, 7, 10<sup>3</sup>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Google Analytics (1, 7)</li> <li>• Sales force marketing cloud (7)</li> <li>• Social studio (7)</li> </ul>

Notes: () indicate the interviewees that mention the object.  
<sup>1</sup>Referred to recall as the objective. <sup>2</sup>Referred to reach as ‘virality’. <sup>3</sup>Talked about the objective of converting but expressed dissatisfaction with not being able to measure. <sup>4</sup>Suspected to analyse sentiment. <sup>5</sup>Used the term ‘reactivity’.  
<sup>6</sup>Indirectly used by all – those that did not mention it use more sophisticated tools that encompass data provided by Facebook Insights.

**Figure 2** High level overview of objective interconnectivity over sample



Most companies only used a single metric to measure objectives, when multiple were often available and could have been used to increase reliability. No companies linked financial metrics to other metrics or objectives. However, it is clear that the types of objectives resemble a tradition sales funnel reflecting the suggestion of Gilfoil and Jobs (2012), shown in Figure 2. Although individual, the companies only used one or two areas and without linking them. Only the social media agency (6) used some combination of all four, although they did not have a clear conversion objective (perhaps reflective of the number of and types of clients it represented).

Finally, the average satisfaction for each was calculated based on the interviewee's overall satisfaction score and the areas they explicitly mentioned or implicitly based on the relationships identified by the categorisation analysis, shown in Table 10. This provides a unique insight as most interviewees were often measuring different objectives in the same way. They were either expressing satisfaction as they were not measuring what they thought they were or satisfaction in terms of objective but dissatisfaction in terms of their measuring tools. The tool/platform was calculated based on explicitly being mentioned by the interviewee to calculate the difference between those measuring the type vs. those with objectives which they may not have been able to measure.

**Table 10** Highlighting aggregated satisfaction for objectives, measures, and tools

		<i>Average interviewee satisfaction (from 5)</i>			
		<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Measures</i>	<i>Platforms</i>	$\mu$
Types	Branding	3.8	3.6	5.0*	4.1
	Engagement	4.0	3.8	3.7	3.8
	Relationships	4.0	3.7	3.0	3.6
	Conversion	3.3	3.8	3.5	3.5

Note: \*Only one FMCG mentioned platforms for this measure.

The first observation was that the branding data was skewed towards branding as the highest levels of satisfaction overall, as only the communications manager of an FMCG and also the largest company explained how they measure their branding objectives using tools which were either unknown or ignored by the other interviewees. In other words, it may appear that multinationals in developing countries were less dissatisfied with fuzzy measures, possibly as the ROI could be measured in other areas.

Second, there was a discrepancy with combinations of measures as consistently higher satisfaction was achieved with objective measures. For example, the number of conversions into sales (implicitly easier to calculate ROI) but contrasted with dissatisfaction with the objective itself. In other words, purely targeting and selling the product online could be easily measured but was perhaps too overt to customers. Whilst building a relationship could be more meaningful as an objective, it is harder to measure and subsequently track.

Third, engagement had the highest average levels of satisfaction (when the FMCG was removed) indicating satisfaction with the types of interaction measures, which could be easily measured and tracked using platforms. Surprisingly the absence of financial measures overall (no interviewee had an explicit measure) was also not a source of conflict with top management. So, in this context, other metrics (number of likes, shares, comments) could apparently be sufficient to justify social media investments. Conversion measures had the lowest overall satisfaction level.

## 5 Discussion

This study is the first to explore social media objectives and measurement in an emerging marketing context. Clear themes and findings were uncovered, and this section discusses these developments in relation to previous literature.

This research found types of objectives resembled a tradition sales funnel: *branding*, *engagement*, *relationship*, then *conversion*. This is similar to developed market practices which attempt to create a marketing funnel linking brand awareness and knowledge to interest and consideration to support and preference to an action (Bagnall, 2012; Gilfoil and Jobs, 2012). Rutter et al. (2016) also found universities were using social media to attract and recruit students through a funnel type approach using conversion. However, whilst this study extends understanding of the social media funnel approach within emerging markets, no companies and only one agency was objectifying the full process using all types, highlighting the underdevelopment of the concept within an emerging market.

### 5.1 Social media objectives

The initial phase of social media marketing was a branding exercise for business. Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) discuss how new media is often treated as traditional media initially, and this study highlighted a key objective as brand communication treated as an ordinary communication channel or substitute traditional channel. Typically, this could be to increase brand awareness, previously highlighted as a factor motivating adoption of social media (Laroche et al., 2013) and indicative of the developing nature of the market (Khanna and Palepu, 1997) with a type of first mover advantage effect to build brand authority and community.

Engagement type objectives were important in building a community and stimulating subsequent interaction. This is consistent with many studies (Cabiddu et al., 2014) and was measured using a combination of interactions (likes, comments, shares, etc.) and community size. Consistent with developed country literature, Hoffman and Fodor (2010) explain that quantitative metrics can be easily calculated, 'engagement rate' being most used as the number of users that take an action compared to the total size of the community (Buhalis and Mamalakis, 2015; McCann and Barlow, 2015). Engagement could then be monitored, and the brand could respond if appropriate.

Next, building and nurturing relationships was important. The findings revealed different social relationship types, ranging from purely 'social listening' as information for collecting feedback, to that of a 'social call centre' to respond and improve experience. Some observers have described social media as a tool for social customer relationship management (Heller Baird and Parasnis, 2011) and our findings provide some support to this within emerging markets. Further, previous research highlights building relationships can increase purchase intention (Kim and Ko, 2012) and move customers further down the funnel of sales conversion.

The ultimate goal was that of conversion. Objectives such as developing the brand, engaging, and building a relationship were to create traffic and acquire new customers. This finding is consistent with previous studies with online marketing activities affect offline activities as cross-channel behaviour within the funnel (Rutter et al., 2016; Wiesel et al., 2011; Dinner et al., 2013). This is particularly interesting as purchases were often made offline rather than online, as e-commerce penetration is still not trusted and



widespread (Medjani, 2017) within that emerging market. However, the findings uncovered issues with measurement of conversion overall.

## 5.2 *Social media measurement*

Findings indicate metrics were not being linked to the objectives efficiently as managers were using incorrect metrics leading to measurement error. In other words, what is understood to be versus what is truly being measured. Seemingly, what Flores (2016) define as ‘counting’ rather than ‘measuring’ and almost all social media managers appear to be what Fisher (2009) explain as ‘definers’. Järvinen and Karjaluoto (2015) rationalise marketing measurement as setting clear objectives to evaluate using appropriate metrics. However, our findings showed only one company developed a metric system based on objectives, whereas other companies were predominantly using metrics simply because they were available.

The findings highlighted an over reliance on single and quantitative metrics, rather than using a balanced method of multiple metrics to measure a single objective as suggested in developed market literature (Blanchard, 2011; Fisher, 2009). The marketing managers did not seem to be aware of qualitative measurement approaches and only one manager talked about a qualitative metric, the analysis of the comments and behaviours using sentiment analysis to measure communication valence in terms of the positive effect on sales (Sonnier et al., 2011) or overall customer sentiment (Mishra and Sharma, 2019). Instead, single quantitative measures were used such as brand image measured by number of followers and conversion being measured by number of website hits.

As a result, whilst conversion was a major type of objective, it was not well defined or measured. Only one brand used sophisticated CRM software to monitor social media usage which converted traffic into showroom visitors and then to customers. However, other companies did not monitor at all or only measured the number of hits to the website. This demonstrated that emerging market managers were still at the early stages of social media measurement, as typically these would be considered ‘micro-conversions’ which focused predominantly on intangible benefits known as fuzzy outcomes whilst not monitoring resultant sales.

Financial outcomes and financial metrics of social media were completely absent in all interviews. The contribution of social media to sales are not always evident (John et al., 2017) as offline sales remain difficult to attribute to social media activity, even in developed economies. This was compounded, as Algeria is at an early stage of e-commerce adoption, with slow penetration and trust of online payments (Medjani, 2017). Therefore, it appeared social media marketing was being used for more intangible benefits and social media managers require more ‘sophisticated’ strategies and tools for omni-channel and cross-channel behaviours, to attribute financial outcomes.

This meant the crucial measure of return on investment is underdeveloped. Hoffman and Fodor (2010) classify fuzzy outcome as either a dead end or possible naïve optimism. For example, most marketers subjectively believed they were succeeding, as their measurement of social media conversions was the number of interactions on Twitter leading to website hits. However, objectively their measurement was fuzzy, as sales were not measured and financial outcomes were ignored in terms of return on investment. Satisfaction toward metrics, as reflected by managers’ subjective valuation provides deeper comprehension.

### 5.3 *Social media satisfaction*

Marketers were least satisfied with social media as a conversion tool. Given conversion metrics were least developed, this was unsurprising. However, the distinction between objective vs. measurement satisfaction was insightful. Given marketers were not measuring what they believed, they also appeared highly satisfied with the measurements. In contrast, they were least satisfied with objectives, appearing to confirm a sense of naïve optimism surrounding conversion. For example, driving traffic to the website through multiple campaigns, but not in fact measuring sales. In terms of ROI, this could be problematic given the number of hits from a particular campaign may be high, but with low sales conversion, whereas another source could be low hits, but with high sales conversion. Thus, emerging market social media managers would not be able to refine and improve ROI.

Satisfaction of social media as an objective and its measures varied greatly between types of businesses. Developing economy brands were also using more developed techniques to achieve brand image objectives, for example through content creation. However, this was a multinational brand likely replicating or adapting developed strategy to the developing context (Khanna and Palepu, 2010). In this way, whilst branding exercises were commonly being undertaken, they also resulted in the highest overall satisfaction, skewed by the one FMCG. This finding could indicate that developed market techniques were being used by foreign companies to apparently good effect (Nguyen et al., 2011). Inversely and overall, brand objective measures showed the lowest levels of satisfaction within the emerging economy, as most interviewees appeared unable to accurately measure the outcomes.

Satisfaction of social media engagement appeared to be linked to the tool used for measurement. To calculate engagement, the findings revealed a tendency to rely on free tools, mainly Facebook Insights and Socialbakers. Those managers that did not use these tools, reasoned that paid solutions (e.g., sales force marketing cloud) provided deeper analysis, consistent with previous studies in developed economies (Wiesel et al., 2011; McCann and Barlow, 2015). Paradoxically, while some paid tools got the highest levels of satisfaction, others got the lowest levels. Such a finding indicates that satisfaction is independent from the nature of the tools (i.e., free vs. paid). For example, Google Analytics which has widespread use in developed markets, resulted with the lowest levels of satisfaction within emerging due to a lack of understanding of its functionality.

Social media measures as a source of managerial conflict did not seem to be an overriding finding of this research. The complete absence of financial measures overall was not a source of conflict with management, contradicting developed economy literature (Kumar et al., 2013). However, this did not negate difficulties in access to financial investment, especially for social media influencing campaigns (e.g., engagement and relationship), as management understood the logic of the traditional type advertising formats (e.g., brand image) but did not understand the value behind social media word-of-mouth marketing campaigns. This highlights the potential for proper return on financial investment measures as an important justification to ensure objectives and measures are set correctly and linked to financial outcomes.

## **6 Conclusions, implications and future research**

Digital technologies and social media are an integral part of marketing strategy. Hence, it is important to measure social media and performance (Järvinen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Given the scarcity of studies about social media measurement in emerging markets, qualitative research was conducted to complement existing developed market literature.

The results highlight social media managers in emerging economies were taking a first step to create and measure social media marketing objectives. Nevertheless, emerging market managers are lagging behind their developed counterparts. Most companies used a single metric to measure an objective, when multiple were available, some used inappropriate metrics to measure an objective, no companies linked financial metrics to objectives and only one agent was using all elements of the marketing funnel. Paradoxically satisfaction remained high and very basic performance measures were calculated using available and free tools, in the form of website hits.

However, collectively emerging market firms were using a fuller spectrum of objective types, measurements, and tools. Hence studies such as this support companies in learning best practices from each other. Further emerging markets can learn from developed markets and need to develop their ROI measures by linking financial metrics with non-financial (Blanchard, 2011) more strongly to give the '360' perspective suggested by Fisher (2009). Accordingly, there is a need for greater education and training as to the essence of measuring social media, available quantitative and qualitative metrics, and importance of linking financial and non-financial measures.

### *6.1 Managerial implications*

A better management and measurement of social media activity is required, and this study offers key suggestions for improvement. A more holistic approach based on the marketing funnel is required to be on par with developed markets. Marketing managers must focus on types of objectives, sub-objectives, most suitable measures and flow through the funnel, rather than picking easy and available metrics (Järvinen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Instead of purely quantitative measures (number of interactions), managers must also mix qualitative metrics (reason for interaction) and link these measures to financial outcomes. Finally, the limitations identified originate from managerial lack of knowledge of best practice. Thus, training would assist understanding of the linkages between objectives, metrics, calculation and use (Mintz and Currim, 2013) in order to be able to 'measure and adjust' and move from 'naïve optimists' to 'iterate for success' as explained by Hoffman and Fodor (2010).

### *6.2 Future research and limitations*

This study was conducted using an Algerian sample and therefore questions about the generalisability of the results to a wider context are not conclusive. Hence, future studies can cross examine these findings in other emerging markets, industries, and business contexts. The study was conducted with a limited number of managers and therefore whilst the purpose was for depth and understanding, a quantitative type study over a large sample could be used for further validation. Moreover, some variables such as maturity

level of the studied companies, were difficult to take into consideration given practicalities of limited access.

In addition, measures are content and platform dependent, therefore future studies could focus on specific ROI measurements. For example, the difference between video campaigns on YouTube and purely textual campaigns on Twitter, or specific campaigns connecting multiple platforms. Further, emerging technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality and artificial intelligence could also be examined within the context of emerging markets.

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