Using Social Media in Retail Businesses in Greece
An Empirical Investigation
Abstract

Nowadays, companies all over the world use Social Media tools in order to advertise and promote their products, services and themselves. They are using them mostly for marketing purposes. This research explores whether the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses is a resource development or risk of increased competition or both or none of them. In addition, it explores the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses currently and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in using Social Media in Greek retail businesses, as well as the future use of Social Media. It also investigates the failure of companies to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in order to conduct several business functions in the Greek retail sector. Moreover, this study addresses the way that case company manages the information given by customers through Social Media. Extensive literature search revealed that almost no research has been conducted earlier on the aforementioned issues in the context of Greek retail businesses. Furthermore, this research has been undertaken because Social Media is a contemporary topic, which always develops rapidly and affects the sales of products, services and the attraction of customers by a company. This study has been conducted by reviewing the current literature on the topics, observing customers on Facebook and Instagram pages of the case company, interviewing experts from the case company and analysing the empirical data. The findings contribute to the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Social Media in Greek retail businesses. In addition, it highlights the usefulness of Social Media for management tasks by company managers and information and knowledge management for companies. The findings of the study can be useful to retail companies in Greek and other countries about how they can significantly benefit from the usage of Social Media in a variety of ways by avoiding the risks.

Keywords

Social Media, Social Networks, Facebook, Instagram, Communication, Information and Knowledge Management, Resource Development, Risk of Increased Competition, Retail Business, Greece, Case Study

NOTE: In this study, consumer and customer mean the same and also firm, company, business and enterprise mean the same.
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1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the background of the study. In addition, the purpose of this chapter is to present the research problem and questions in detail as well as the major objectives of the study. Moreover, the significance of the study and motivations for the study are described analytically. In the end, the scope of the research is defined and the structure of thesis is described.

1.1 Background of the study

Many studies have already been done on the topic of Social Media in retail businesses (Paquette, 2013; Shawndra, Provost and Volinsky, 2006.; Costantinides et al., 2008; Hansen, Shneiderman and Smith, 2011; Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides and Alarcón-del-Amo, 2014; Ramanathan, Subramanian and Parrott, 2017). Specifically, Paquette (2013) explores the gaps of Social Media marketing research and describes four main themes regarding Social Media marketing research: Virtual Brand Communities, Consumers Attitudes and Motives, User Generated Content and Viral Advertising. Also, she points out the need for future studies in order to explore the benefits gained by marketing on Social Networking sites in small retailers (like fashion wear or grocery shops).

Paquette (2013) claims that Social Media, if it is considered as a marketing tool, should be defined after Web 2.0 does. So, Web 2.0 describes the new way in which the users use the World Wide Web, a place where content is continuously transformed by operators in a sharing and collaborative way (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 has developed from simple information retrieval to interactivity, interoperability and collaboration (Campbell et al., 2011). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) define Social Media as “a 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”. Besides, there are several important features in a website in order to meet the requirements as a Social Network website: user profiles, content, method for connection with people and post comments on each other’s pages and joining virtual groups based on common interests like fashion or politics (Cox, 2010).

Furthermore, Paquette (2013) refers to a new concept of shopper marketing, which focuses on the interaction between businesses and consumers. According to Shankar et al. (2011, p. 29), “shopper marketing is the planning and execution of all marketing activities that influence a shopper along and beyond the entire path of purchase, from the point at which the motivation to shop first emerges through purchase, consumption, repurchase, and recommendation”. If people perceive shopping services on Social Networking sites as useful and easy to use, then they are willing to shop for several things on Social Networks (Cha, 2009). By providing shopping services on Social Networks, the business growth is attained for retailers due to the diversity of customers who use Social Media sites. The broad range of consumers utilizes Social Networks leads to many target markets (Cha, 2009). As a result, an effective platform is created for retailers in order to promote mostly their products, services and brands to potential customers. Furthermore, shopper marketing could join forces with shoppers to improve products, create clear messages, identify promoters and demonstrate the importance of Social Media within a marketing plan for retailers. Several advancements in Social Media sites have created customer communities that define new ways in which
companies and consumers can interact with each other in order to share information about brand products and services. For example, virtual brand communities create a computer-generated space for consumers and retailers to connect with each other via marketing (Paquette, 2013).

Virtual Brand Communities (VBC) can be described as “aggregations of consumers that occur on the internet because of their interest in some brand or product” (Georgi and Moritz, 2012, p. 3). More specifically, a brand community consists of a group of people who share the similar interests in a particular brand or product. Casalo et al. (2008) stated that when a member participates in VBC, then the amount of participation is increasing. As a result, trust is the main aspect to ensure the survival of VBC. Cha (2009) highlights another important aspect, security, which affects the opinions of consumers through Social Networks and impact trust. In fact, several new forms of social interactions are taking place within VBC such as electronic Consumer to Consumer Interaction (eCCI), which are interactions between consumers of e-services (Georgi and Moritz, 2012). Due to eCCI, customers have a dominant role in influencing each other with their consumption decisions. Furthermore, Georgi and Moritz (2012) discovered the concept of electronic consumer to consumer interaction quality (eCCIq) and found that seven factors are important for its success: content, security, hedonic (the emotional aspects of consumers’ interactions with products), quality, atmosphere, convenience and social. For example, when a customer asks a question through a Social Network site about the color of a product, then another customer answers the question. Of course, the eCCI would be highly successful if the question is answered by another customer quickly, correctly and in a friendly way. The consumers feel excited and engaged with products and firms when they can submit feedback to other customers (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Additionally, it is very important for retailers to be aware of the factors which affect consumer attitudes and motives because customers create content about brands (Heinonen, 2011). Chu (2011) highlighted the connection between Facebook brand related group participation, advertising responses and the psychological factors of self-revelation and attitudes between members of Facebook groups. The members of groups on Facebook are more likely to reveal their personal data than nonmembers are. Chu (2011) explains that group participation and engagement with online advertisements require a higher level of personal information because users reveal their connections with Facebook groups. The users of Facebook groups maintain a positive attitude toward Social Media and advertising and join a brand’s Facebook group in order to receive messages about promotion (Paquette, 2013).

Cox (2010) also researched the connection between age and attitude and discovered that Social Network user attitude toward online advertising formats like videos or blogs differed to some extent across age groups. Analytically, Cox (2010) explains that users between 18th and 28th age have strong positive attitudes towards blogs or videos or brand channels. The users between 35th and 54th ages preferred advertisements formats on video and brand channels due to the informative feature of them. As a result, consumption, participation and production are consumer’s activities which are not related to one motivation but a combination of a variety of motivations (Heinonen, 2011). Awareness of consumer’s motives is important because it provides a deeper understanding of what influences users to create content about a brand or store (Paquette, 2013).
Furthermore, user generated content produces social currency for retailers because it helps in defining a brand. User generated content describes “the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media, usually applied to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end users” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Thus, social currency is when individuals share information about a brand (Zinnbauer and Honer, 2011).

Consumer Generated Advertising (CGA) is a type of user generated content, which refers to specific circumstances where customers create the brand and focus on messages with the purpose of informing, persuading and reminding other people (Campbell et al., 2011). Therefore, Muniz and Schau (2007) and Pehlivan, Sarican and Berthon (2011) use the term vigilante marketing in order to describe CGA. In fact, vigilante marketing is defined as “unpaid advertising and marketing efforts, including one to one, one to many, and many to many commercially oriented communications, undertaken by brand loyalists on behalf of the brand” (Muniz and Schau, 2007, p. 35). Besides, Campbell et al. (2011) mention that in our days, the traditional marketing is coexisting with CGA. But, CGA can either support traditional marketing or impact it in a negative way. However, Taylor, Strutton and Thompson (2012) explored that when consumers receive an online advertisement, they are more willing to share it with others because it is representative of who they are and what they like. The marketing of a company needs to be familiar with its target market. Zhang, Jansen and Chowdhury (2011) highlighted that businesses should have a brand presence on several different Social Media sites in order to increase their customers. In our days, consumers are more informed about the products of a company due to the Social Media sites. Businesses have realized the need of creating their own brand Social Media site not only to control some of the marketing part, but also to stay informed of the consumer generated content. So, companies should pay attention about the risks involved as their brands become an important part of the virtual communities within Social Networks (Zinnbauer and Honer, 2011). Viral advertising is a way in which brands become a vital part of Social Media. More and more consumers think about Facebook groups as reliable sources of information; new chances arise in order to build consumer-brand relationships and viral advertising platforms (Chu, 2011).

Viral advertising deals with marketing and providing more information regarding brands or products. Online advertising has a major advantage due to communication of a brand’s intended consumer (Bampo et al., 2008). According to Bampo et al. (2008, p. 274), “viral communication affords the marketer a greater degree of creative license through a message delivery medium that is more intimate and personalized, thereby increasing the likelihood of reaching hard to get audience members”. Social Media provide a new level for brand marketing and consumers contribute to the communication, so companies have become more creative when trying to get control of their marketing (Chi, 2011). Pavlou and Stewart (2000) figured out another approach in order to measure the effectiveness of a company’s participation in interactive advertising. Some measures focus on media choice, information search and attention to the process of information and some others to the effects of consumers’ using interactive media. As a result, retailers can detect the type of information consumers seek and find more useful when assessing a product (Pavlou and Stewart, 2000). This allows for retailers to consider how the consumers will respond to their promotional and marketing strategies on Social Media (Paquette, 2013).
Paquette (2013) states that retailers should be creative when engaging customers on Social Media sites in order to increase awareness of their brands. Besides, Social Media sites consist of a successful way of marketing and user experience of their brands because of the information which is stored in them. Hill, Provost and Volinsky (2006) highlighted that a company can profit from Social Media in order to predict the likelihood of purchase intention by taking into account a firm’s choice of network like Facebook, Instagram, etc. and by examining the data of networks. “Assessing a network’s data substantially improves a company’s marketing efforts because it provides the company with vital information on the network’s users, which helps determine the best social media tactics for that particular site” (Paquette, 2013, p. 20).

In addition, Sorescue et al. (2011) stated that retailers should overtake the advertising aspect of Social Networking sites and find new ways to use them in order to conduct conversations with consumers. Many companies use Social Media sites as strategic tools and are hiring employees to watch over their Social Media pages (Sinclaire and Vogus, 2011). Social Media exploit information about consumers’ behavior regarding their purchasing intentions and as a result businesses should embody Social Networking sites into their business models. “A business model is a system of codependent structures, activities, and processes that serve as a firm’s organizing logic and create value for customers, itself, and its partners” (Paquette, 2013, p. 21). Mangold and Faulds (2009) suggest that Social Media should be regarded as an integral part of an organization’s integrated marketing strategy and should not be taken lightly.

Shawndra, Provost and Volinsky (2006) state that a company, using Social Media, should predict the presumption of purchase intention. Of course, this can be done by taking into account a company’s choice of Social Media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other medium and examine their data. According to their study, assessing a network’s data improves the marketing efforts of the firm because it provides vital information on the users. As a result, it can be argued that, if a company aims to a specific target market and knows which Social Media sites to utilize and then there is a greater chance that the online marketing will be successful.

Constantinides, Romero and Boria (2008) explore the importance of Social Media as a strategic marketing tool and propose some strategies in order to increase the competitive advantage to retail companies. Specifically, they recommend two main strategies: either using Social Media in a passive way (as a way of listening of voice of customers) or in an active way (as a Public Relations tool, a way of advertising their products). Regarding the passive way, customers provide suggestions and opinions through Social Media to the company in order to improve or change a product. In the active way, Social Media are operated like a way of advertising firm’s products or services in order to attract more consumers.

Hansen, Shneiderman and Smith (2011), Paquette (2013), Shawndra, Provost and Volinsky (2006) and Constantinides et al. (2008) have studied Social Media in retail businesses. However, the main focus of their studies was on the marketing role of Social Media in retail businesses. They explore the ways of advertising products of companies through Social Media sites in order to increase their popularity and awareness to consumers. They mention that viral advertising is the most popular way to advertise a product in order to attract consumers and transform them to customers. Through the viral advertising, the retailers provide much information for their products and services and as a result, communication is more targeted to a brand’s intended customers. Although this study investigates the use of Social Media and Social
Networks in retail businesses, the difference is that it focuses on the company’s total development from this technology.

Social Media are also criticized for targeting people as consumers to the degree that users have choices, but end up with choosing messages which are not aligned with their values. Moreover, the criticism of Social Media often devolves into the situation in which individuals choose only the information that they need and this leads to knowing less than exploring a variety of viewpoints before making a decision. Social Media can be abused for cyber bullying too, as many people use Social Media in order to bully, harass or degrade someone. But, the more people use the Internet for financial transactions, the risk of hacking or robbery is increasing (Hanson, 2016).

In addition, Sandberg and Alvesson (2010) identify three basic modes of gap-spotting: confusion, neglect and application spotting. Confusion spotting deals with literature which contains contradictory explanations of the same phenomenon (such as concepts which have been defined by researchers in a different way). Neglect spotting deals with a topic which has not been investigated in previous literature. Application spotting deals with literature which needs to be complemented with a new research approach. Hence, for this specific study, there is a neglect spotting due to the uniqueness of specific area (Greek retail businesses). Social Media phenomenon in retail businesses has not thoroughly been researched in this specific country for the last seven years. Of course, Social Media in retail businesses in Greece were not the same either on application or on use, before the economic crisis of the country due to less popularity or limited functions of them.

1.2 Research problem and questions

In contemporary societies, technology is consecutively developed and as a result, it creates several chances in daily lives of humans. Although technology is not accessible and beneficial for many people in some countries due to political, economical, technological or geographical reasons, information is hiding everywhere and accessible to everyone. In particular, information is critical to the competitiveness for the businesses of the private sector. The modern businesses demand for various categories of information such as customers, orders, sales, inventory, stock, etc. This information should be integrated and be accurate and up to date. So, the management of information is important to business success. Today, some terms like eBusiness (electronic business), eCommerce (electronic commerce), eGovernment (electronic government) are very familiar to people, especially in businesses, which show how important ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) and IS (Information Systems) are to modern organizations (Beynon-Davies, 2013).

Simultaneously, these terms are familiar also with Social Media concept, which refers to a set of online tools that supports social interaction between users. Social Media is about transforming monologue (one-to-many) into dialog (many-to-many) (Hansen, Shneiderman and Smith, 2011). Of course, Social Media provide several benefits (such as ongoing communication between employees and managers, sharing projects in teams, better communication between customers and employees) to businesses in order to develop them. They could be risky due to the increased competition, but if a company does not use the power of various social media, it will have high chance of losing its marketing communication competitiveness, when its competitors use the integrated power of social media, their websites and other communication tools. Therefore, this
study conducts research on the usage of Social Media in retail businesses in Greece. Specifically, it explores if the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses is either a way of development or a way of increasing the risk of competition or both or none of them in the Greek market of retail companies.

The main research question addressed in this study is: Why the use of Social Media in Greek retail businesses is a way of development or a way of increasing risk of competition or both of them or none of them?

In order to answer the above research question, the following sub questions are formulated:

1. How Social Media are used in Greek retail businesses? What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses?
2. Why do companies fail to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media to conduct various business functions in the Greek retail sector? How can they be successful in using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in Greek retail businesses?
3. How do Greek retail companies use Social Media to perform customer knowledge management?

1.3 Major objectives of the study

This study explores if the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses is either a resource development or a risk of increased competition or both or none of them. Analytically, it investigates in detail, through the interview and observation methods, the factors which are accountable for either developing a firm or increasing the risk of competition by using the Social Media for both advertising and becoming more popular. The major objectives of the study, as presented below, are achieved through theoretical and empirical research:

- To identify whether the usage of Social Media in Greek retail companies is a resource development or risk of increased competition or both or none of them.
- To describe the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Social Media in Greek retail enterprises.
- To identify the use of Social Media Technologies in Greek retail businesses at present and in the future.
- To clarify the differences between Social Media and Social Networks.
- To explain the importance of Facebook and Instagram pages of Greek retail business in order to spread their products and services and become popular as brands.
- To point out the reasons of failure of Greek retail companies to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in order to conduct several business functions.
- To describe the ways that a Greek retail company manage the information given by customers through Social Media sites.
- To find out whether Greek retail companies were using Social Media during the severe economic crisis, seven years ago in order to increase their reputation and attract more consumers in comparison with the present time and how does it differ from the present days. The findings of this research will be important in showing the evolution of these media over the years in contrast to the present days. It would be
interesting to notice the changes over the years and how people have transformed their professional lives using more frequently Social Media tools.

1.4 The significance of the study

A significant feature of our modern world is the unprecedented development and use of technologies which support social interaction. Social mediating technologies have introduced new ways of working, communicating or playing and created an important meaning to people. Billions of people all over the world weave a complex collection of email, Twitter, mobile short text messages, shared photos, podcasts, audio and video streams, blogs, wikis, discussion groups, virtual reality game environments, and Social Networking sites like Facebook and MySpace to connect them with the world and the people they care about. The online Social Media produce an enormous amount of social data which can be used in order to better understand individuals, organizations and communities.

Although there have been carried out many researches on Social Media in retail businesses, this study is significant because Social Media consist of an important and contemporary topic which is demanding not only in businesses but in everyday lives of people. So, this study deals with the usage of Social Media in retail businesses, but not with a focus on marketing role of Social Media. It focuses on retail businesses in Greece, a country with high economic instability, in order to illustrate the usefulness of Social Media from an economic perspective. Besides, this study explores the potential development of retail businesses because of Social Media use by providing empirical evidence. In fact, it deals with the growth of popularity and the economic prosperity of the retail businesses. Additionally, the study investigates the potential risk of increased competition, which could be increased due to the fact that more and more retail companies use Social Media in order to advertise their products and services and attract more consumers. Of course, the development and the risk of increased competition in retail businesses in Greece could be both happened, each of them for different reasons.

The importance of the study is highlighted by the interviews, which are conducted with managers and executives of a well-known Greek company, in order to get their experiences, opinions, etc. about the importance or not of Social Media in retail businesses in Greece. Observation is made too, in order to illustrate the behavior and online reactions of consumers for a brand or a product of a Greek retail business. As a result, the usefulness of Facebook and Instagram, in order to make popular a product or a brand, is presented. Furthermore, this study is significant not only for researchers, who are interested in Social Media phenomenon, but for entrepreneurs, who are interested in business in Greece and would like to know several ways for developing their current or future business. Moreover, this research is interesting for consumers, who can realize their thoughts and actions regarding Social Media, in order to gain trustworthiness and awareness for a product or a brand. People could understand clearly why they like a status of a retail company in Facebook page, which factors are important in order to trust and buy a product or a service and what is the main element that attracts their attention.
1.5 Motivations for the study

This study explores if the usage of Social Media in retail businesses in Greece, is a resource development or a risk of increased competition or both or none of them. The main motivation for this study is that Social Media is a timely and significant topic, which is consecutively getting developed. This phenomenon is always changing and developing rapidly, affecting people’s daily lives and businesses' progress. I am always interested in the increasing development of Technology all over the world, but the last seven years my crucial interest has been on Social Media. I have chosen this topic to make research in order to explore the evolution and the effects of Social Media in businesses. In fact, the usage of Social Media is examined through the retail businesses. Specifically, the research is conducted in a kids fashion wear company, where I work. So, I could have a better access to Social Media department through the company and get several insights from managers of the company.

Greece is my home country and the last seven years it has been facing multiple problems regarding its economy. I have chosen to make an empirical research in Greek retail companies because I would like to identify the influence of Social Media in Greek retail businesses particularly. As I mentioned earlier, many studies have been done regarding Social Media in retail businesses, but they focused on marketing role of Social Media and ignored largely other aspects of Social Media. This study focuses on the economic perspective of the usage of Social Media in retail businesses. Moreover, this study describes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Social Media and Social Networks as well as the differences between them. Lastly, the case explores, through the Facebook and Instagram sites, the Greek retail businesses because of the popularity and the wide usage of these media from people worldwide.

1.6 Scope of the study

The study deals with the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses. It explores if using Social Media in retail businesses in Greece, leads either to development of the company or the increasing risk of competition or both or none of them. Regarding the Social Media phenomenon, Facebook and Instagram are chosen for under-research to this topic. The research is conducted in the retail sector, which deals with kids fashion wear, because I work in this sector and company and therefore, I can have access to better and appropriate, current and high quality information about the case company. Greece is selected because no studies have been done on the research topic of this study in Greece earlier.

Social Media tools have been researched in the retail sectors that particularly dealt with their marketing role. Many studies have been done about the marketing role of Social Media in retail businesses, but it is beyond this study. The focus of this study is the economic perspective of companies. Either the development or the risk of competition or both of them or none of them are the main issues of this research in order to examine the economic effects from the usage of Social Media in retail businesses.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The first chapter of the thesis consists of the introduction section, which provides the background of the study and the presentation of research problem and questions. Also,
the chapter includes the major objectives of the study, the significance of the study, the motivations for the study, the scope of the study and the structure of the whole thesis in order to highlight the justification and importance of the topic under investigation.

The second chapter consists of the literature review, which provides the definitions of key concepts of the research as well as several detailed information about multiple main themes and theories relevant to Informatics and Social Media in retail businesses. The literature is chosen based on the research questions and research objectives.

The third chapter describes the research paradigm and approach, which is followed during the research process. Additionally, the research method and the research design are presented, while the case company and interviewees, data collection methods and the data analysis process are included in research design. Moreover, the validity and reliability are discussed in this chapter, as well as the ethical considerations. Lastly, an important report is done regarding the limitations of applied methodology and the strategies utilized to overcome these limitations.

The fourth chapter describes the case in detail. The collected data was analysed in detail in order to find answers to research questions. The results from the observation method and the answers of the interviewees are discussed from multiple aspects in order to examine if the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses is a resource development or a risk of increased competition or both or none of them.

The fifth chapter discusses the empirical findings, specifically about the answers of the research questions of this study and compares and contrasts with prior studies.

The sixth chapter concludes the study and discusses its results. The particular limitations and future research directions are also discussed in this chapter.
2 Literature Review

This chapter begins with the definition of several key concepts which are directly related to this thesis. Then, the Web 2.0 and its implementation in retail business are described as well as a SWOT analysis of Social Media is presented in order to create a clear and overall picture of them. The Social Media Technology in retail business is reported and the most famous Social Networking sites provide explicit information about the status and use of them. In addition, Communication and Knowledge Management theories are reviewed, in order to connect them with the topic of research.

2.1 Definitions of key concepts

The literature review starts by introducing some of the key concepts of the study such as Web 2.0, Social Media, Social Networks, Resource Development and Risk of Increased Competition. These key concepts are related directly to this research and they are defined briefly before the detailed literature review.

2.1.1 Web 2.0

The Web 2.0 was introduced in 1999 by DiNucci (1999) and popularized by O’Reilly (2005). This term describes World Wide Web websites which focus on user-generated content, usability (ease of use) and interoperability (a website can work well with other products or systems) for end users (Wikipedia, 2017a). In fact, it demonstrates websites which use technology beyond the static pages of earlier websites. In general, Web 2.0 allows online users to interact and collaborate with others based on a Social Media dialogue. These online users are mentioned as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community. Examples of Web 2.0 include Social Networking and Social Media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Linked In, etc.), blogs, wikis, video sharing sites (YouTube) and Web applications.

Regarding the retail marketers, Web 2.0 offers the opportunity of engaging with consumers. Marketers who use almost daily Web 2.0 tools in order to collaborate with consumers on product development, service enhancement and promotion are increasing (Parise and Salvatore, 2008). In addition, small businesses that use Web 2.0 have increased their competitive advantage in order to compete with larger firms. For example, a company could offer some coupons or discounts for several products and services to customers just through its Facebook page.
2.1.2 Social Media

Social Media are related to a self-generated and authentic conversation between people about a particular interest and is built on the thoughts and experiences of the participants. In general, Social Media phenomenon is about sharing and aiming at a collective version, often intending to offer a more appropriated of informed choice at the end. Social Media change over time and allow people to generate content in a participative way whenever they want to add any information. Moreover, Social Media concept consists of online and mobile forums which include Social Networking sites, blogs, wikis, etc. From a business perspective, it includes company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer to consumer email, consumer products rating, etc (Evans, 2008).

Furthermore, Social Media are computer-mediated technologies which accommodate the creation and sharing of information or ideas or career interests or any other forms of virtual communities. Social Media are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). User-generated content like posts or comments or digital photos or videos and generally online data are generated through online interactions. Online users can create personal profiles through websites and communicate with each other. Additionally, Social Media use web-based technologies, desktop computers and mobile technologies (smart phones or tablets) in order to create interactive platforms which will connect individuals, communities or businesses (Wikipedia, 2017b).

2.1.3 Social Networks

Social Networks consist of platforms which allow users to build personal web sites that are accessible to other users for exchange of personal communication. In example, Facebook, Instagram and MySpace are some of the Social Networks sites (Costantinides et al., 2008). According to McKinsey (2007), Social Networks are systems which allow members of a specific site to learn about other members’ skills, knowledge, talents or preferences. In addition, Social Networks are defined as online location where a user has the ability to create a profile and build a personal network with personal information and connects him or her with other users. Wikipedia (2017c) defines Social Network as a service which is focused on building communities of people who share activities and interests, while Stroud (2008) mentions that the participants of Social Networks are individuals who are interested in exploring interests and activities of other people (Constantinides, Romero and Boria, 2008). A Social Network is “a website where one connects with those sharing personal or professional interests, place of origin, education at a
particular school, etc. The sites typically allow users to create a profile describing themselves and to exchange public or private messages and list other users or groups they are connected to in some way.” (Dictionary.com, 2017, p. 1)

Moreover, this term has not any absolute definition and there are several descriptions. But generally, this concept refers to personal connections between people in order to interconnect them through the Internet. Perhaps the uniqueness of Social Networking is the reality that people can communicate with each other. As the Internet provides a distribution form which allows people to transcend time and space and World Wide Web makes the Web 2.0 possible in order to allow messages send back and forth interactively, then individuals have the structure available to facilitate the flow of a wide range of information. As a result, Social Networking is the most powerful means of communicating with individuals. Social Networks change the way people interact, when the physical body is not present. They are evolving and changing all the time, while they are often facilitating the way people connect with others. The important fact is that Social Networks could change the way people interact in face-to-face situations due to the habits and expectations of people, which are blurred. “For example, people’s sense of what friends are influenced by the way they think of online friends and real-world, face-to-face encounters with friends. A sense of a person’s popularity can be influenced by the number of ‘likes’ or ‘dislikes’ they receive when posting something in an online format. And, most important, a person’s sense of identity or digital presence can moderate the way a person migrates from an online virtual space to a real-world space” (Hanson, 2016, p. 324).

Furthermore, Social Networks can change the way people think about some forms of communication from personal interaction to participating in a society. Twitter, for example, could be a good platform for spreading jokes, or pointed observations but this short messaging service could be less effective when engaging in a dialogue is necessary. Continuously, honesty is an important subject of Social Networks which needs a lot of attention due to the possibility of people who are hiding in order to harm or bully someone else. In addition, Social Networks are often focused on communities that have the benefit of extending beyond traditional geographic boundaries. For example, individuals who use Facebook, LinkedIn or MySpace can connect with other people by following them and the already friends can see each other’s profiles which include personal information. People with similar interests usually participate in online communities which are called Social Networks and they can deal with sports, gossip, health information, etc. Thus, one important benefit of Social Networks is that they can operate either in real time or over time. Real time communication takes place in a live, often back-and-forth exchange and most closely resembles the time in thought and action as face-to-face conversation. Over time communication deals with participants who receive and answer to messages in their leisure time. For example, people leave posts on any Social Network and then wait for other’s answers (Hanson, 2016).

2.1.4 Resource Development

In this study, Resource Development means making the brand name and trademark of a company widely known, increasing the reputation of a company and its products and services, generating economic prosperity of an enterprise. Generally, companies worldwide have several functions and services which are valuable for their development. For example, Social Media tools and services could be one important function in order to develop a company. Social Media could provide more customers to
the company or make it very popular to a larger audience. Another example could be the e-commerce, which helps customers shopping online and provide better access to company’s products and services.

2.1.5 Risk of Increased Competition

Risk of Increased Competition refers to the relation between the ability and performance of a company to sell or supply its products and services in a particular market and the ability and performance of other companies in the same market (Wikipedia, 2017d). For example, an increasing number of enterprises use mostly Social Media and Social Networks in order to promote their products and services and attract more customers. If a company does not use Social Media or use in a limited scale or ineffectively, while its competitors use Social Media and Social Networks extensively to promote their products and services and attract more customers, then the company will be at risk of competitiveness loss.

2.2 Social Media and Social Networks

Social Media could be defined as a strategy and a way out for broadcasting, while Social Networking is a tool and a utility for connecting with others (Cohen, 2009). Furthermore, there are several differences between Social Media and Social Networks. Firstly, the definition of both of them seems to have an important difference. Social Media is still media which is used mainly to transmit or share information to a broad audience, while Social Networks are act of engagement as people with common interests associate together and build relationships through a community (Cohen, 2009; Hartshorn, 2010). Additionally, another difference is about the communication type of them. Bedell (2010) reported that Social Media is just a system, a communication channel. In contrast, Social Networks are a two-way communication, where conversations are at the core, and through which relationships are developed. In fact, the timely responses and the “asking or telling” are dissimilarity between Social Media and Social Networks. Social Media are taking time to automate individual conversations. On the other hand, Social Networks are direct communication between the user and the person that someone chooses to connect with (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

The term “Social Networking sites” is often used alternatively with Social Media. However, Social Media join up the participants by generating personal information and inviting friends or colleagues to have access to this information (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Thus, Social Media consist of an environment where Social Networking takes place and has modified the way in which consumers gather appropriate information in order to buy several products or make use of multiple services (Paquette, 2013). Furthermore, while Social Media and Social Networks are often mentioned as one term, Brennan and Schafer (2010) mention that Social Networking sites are a subset of Social Media. Not all forms of Social Media are Social Networks. Specifically, Social Media sites which are Social Networks also are those with the primary purpose of connecting people with common interests such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, MySpace and Twitter. For example, YouTube, which began as a video-sharing site, incorporates features of Social Networking because users can have a personal profile, “channel page” as YouTube calls it, and makes friends too. In the same way, Flickr, which is a photo-sharing site, is considered as a Social Network because it enables forming communities around a particular topic. But, wikis, blogs and Social bookmarking sites
are considered as Social Media but not Social Networks due to the lack of “friendling” (Brennan and Schafer, 2010).

2.3 The Web 2.0 and its implementation in Retail Business

Furthermore, the term Web 2.0, as mentioned before, is usually used instead of Social Media concept. O’Reilly (2005) officially invented this term and described it as a “platform harnessing collective intelligence”. Although most people did not disagree that Web 2.0 is the new generation of web, a precise definition is not yet accepted. Hoegg et al. (2006, p. 13) defined Web 2.0 as “the philosophy of mutually maximizing collective intelligence and added value for each participant by formalized and dynamic information sharing and creation”. Moreover, Anderson (2007) defined Web 2.0 as a group of technologies which have become associated with terms like blogs, wikis, podcasts, RSS feeds, etc. and these technologies contribute to a more socially connected Internet in which everyone is able to add or edit content (Constantinides, Romero and Boria, 2008).

Generally, Web 2.0 was defined as a social phenomenon, which derives content and builds personal relationships with the consumers. The most important thing is how marketers effectively leverage Web 2.0 and derive value from Social Media tools. For example, they get real-time feedback on existing or new products and services, build communities among consumers about a brand or service and leverage customer self-service (Parise and Guinan, 2008). Constantinides and Fountain (2008, p. 7) proposed the following definition: “Web 2.0 is a collection of open-source, interactive and user-controlled online applications expanding the experience, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes. Web 2.0 applications support the creation of informal users’ networks, facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing the efficient generation, dissemination, sharing and refining of informational content.” In conclusion, Web 2.0 represents the second generation of World Wide Web, where content is user-generated, interactive and dynamic. Examples about Social Networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and other Web-based communities, services like Google Docs, Web applications like Gmail, YouTube, Wikipedia, blogs and mash ups. Moreover, Social Media consist of electronic media for social interaction. They make use of Web 2.0 highly scalable and accessible publishing techniques in order to transform media monologues into social dialogues. Social Media both support democratization of knowledge and allow users to be transformed content producers than content consumers. Several examples of public Social Media sites are Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, Foursquare, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. (Brennan and Schafer, 2010). Constantinides, Romero and Boria (2008) suggest a detailed illustration of Web 2.0 (or Social Media) towards three main dimensions: Application Types, Social Effects and Enabling Technologies. These dimensions of Web 2.0 are shown in the Figure 4.

![Figure 4: The three dimensions of Web 2.0 (Constantinides et al., 2008)](image-url)
Application Types

✓ **Blogs**: Short Weblogs / online journals which are the most known and fastest growing category of Web 2.0 applications and often combined with Podcasts and Video casts (Du and Wagner, 2006).

✓ **Social Networks**: Platforms which allow users to build personal web sites that are accessible to other users in order to exchange personal content and communication.

✓ **(Content) Communities**: Web sites for organizing and sharing particular types of content such as applications for video sharing (YouTube), publicly edited encyclopaedias (Wikipedia).

✓ **Forums / Bulletin Boards**: Sites for exchanging ideas and information, especially for particular interests.

✓ **Content Aggregators**: Applications which allow users to customize the web content they want to access. These sites use the Rich Site Summary (RSS) technique. (Constantinides, Romero and Boria, 2008)

Social Effects

The easy and open access of information is the key advantage of Web 2.0 applications. Copying, sharing, editing and reproducing are some of the common practices of Web 2.0 domain. The sharing of information results in democratization of knowledge and allows active participation by users as reviewers and editors. The users can easily create communities with particular interests and share their experience and knowledge. Web 2.0 applications have become well known due to both the advantages they offer to users such as transparency and contacts with other users and their effort on customer power (Urban, 2003; 2005). The customer’s comments are posted in different forums or virtual communities and are more powerful and trustful than expert’s reviews (Gillin, 2007). The influence of blogs and podcasts is increasing because of the fast expansion of the audience. Another interesting social effect in online communities is the self-regulated quality assurance process observed (Hoegg et al., 2006). In general, the social effects of Social Media consist of an interesting research area in order to shape future consumer behavior (Constantinides, Romero and Boria, 2008).

Enabling Technologies

Most of the technologies involved in Web 2.0 are not new and as a result there is a main difference between Web 2.0 and Web 1.0 (the previous generation of Internet applications). The difference is that some of these applications, which are based on open source software, are the result of collaborative development and real time improvement (O’Reilly, 2005; Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). Some of the most important enabling technologies and development tools are described further:

✓ **RSS**: Rich Site Summary. A way to customize online content likes Google Reader, My Yahoo, etc which allow monitoring of user’s favorite blogs.

✓ **Wikis**: applications which allow collaborative publishing. In specific, they are multi-author edition pages in which several authors can collaborate in order to edit and elaborate some documents. An example is Wikipedia.

✓ **Widgets**: generic term of a Graphical User Interface which displays information and allow users to interface with the application and operating system in different ways.
✓ **Mash-ups**: aggregators of content from different online sources in order to create a new service.
✓ **AJAX**: Asynchronous JavaScript and XML. A web development technique which is used for interactive web applications and allows actualization of web pages, facilitating navigation within sites such as maps, videos, photos, etc.
✓ **RIA**: Rich Internet Applications. They are web applications which have the features and functionality of traditional desktop applications. (Constantinides, Romero and Boria, 2008)

After the detailed illustration of Web 2.0, Jain and Ganesh (2007) describe the effects of its implementation in retail business, which can be divided into three dimensions: content parameters, collaboration parameters and commerce parameters that are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content parameters</th>
<th>Collaboration parameters</th>
<th>Commerce parameters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Unique user experiences (RIA)</td>
<td>➢ Customer peep-to-peer network, collective intelligence</td>
<td>➢ End user product customizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Dynamic user help (peep-to-peer</td>
<td>➢ Collaborative product customizations</td>
<td>➢ Contextual shopping help (live agent chat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or central)</td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Voice based shopping help (VoIP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Data Feeds (RSS, ATOM, HML, JS)</td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Comparison shopping (across brands, end users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Podcasts/Vodcasts</td>
<td></td>
<td>recommendations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Search (semantic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Aggregation mechanism (mashups)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Implementation of Web 2.0 in retail business (Jain and Ganesh, 2007)

Firstly, content parameters are related to tools and techniques in order to allow a better information environment. For example, RIA (Rich Internet Application) allows a higher quality presentation format with an easier and user-friendly interface that enhances the customer experience. Similarly, the same happens with RSS feeds, podcasts, video casts or mashups. Furthermore, collaboration parameters report the applications which allow consumers-retailer interaction and participation of consumers or others in products or services productions. In the end commerce parameters are connected with functions which support consumer’s choices and give a higher value to the chosen option. For example, an offer of a shopping assistant or a complementary support service through voice or chatting (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008).

### 2.4 SWOT Analysis of Social Media in retail business

A SWOT analysis consists of a framework which identifies and analyses the internal and external factors that can have an impact on the viability of a company. In fact, it identifies the internal strengths in order to exploit the external opportunities, while avoiding the external threats and addressing the internal weaknesses (Fine, 2009). In Table 2 below, a SWOT analysis of Social media and Social Networks in retail business is presented in order to define several strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of them in retail businesses.
Table 2: A SWOT Analysis of Social Media in retail business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• growth of reputation</td>
<td>• time intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• communication between employees and management</td>
<td>• lack of feedback control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• different content than text (webcasts, videos)</td>
<td>• lack of measuring results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• communication between company and customers</td>
<td>• information security problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• interaction between the current and future customers of a company</td>
<td>• fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• instant marketing announcements</td>
<td>• lack of face-to-face communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• free of cost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• source of hiring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• easier online shopping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• increasing sales of a company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• joining online communities</td>
<td>• viruses or malware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• communication between individuals and company</td>
<td>• hacking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• spread of events or announcements</td>
<td>• economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• acquisition of new customers</td>
<td>• competitiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths**

A major strength of Social Media deals with the increasing of brand experience of a company in order to have a well-built brand name, which will be more attractive both to customers and the potential employees. In other words, Social Media helps in building a good reputation for a business organization. Brand awareness starts with the experiences of the employees of a company (Carraher, Parnell and Spillan, 2009). Social media forums act as a dynamic way to communicate the brand value and brand attribute as they facilitate open forms of communication. Also, Social Media and Social Networks advance an open communication between employees and management. In fact, employees and management can get through several Social Networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. as well as organization’s group within these sites and enable employees to share project ideas and work in teams effectively, which helps in sharing knowledge and experiences. Also, a better context than text is promoted such as webcasts and videos in order to illustrate possible online material or communicate from a distance. Moreover, Social Media and Social Networks provide a helpful communication between a retail enterprise and its customers in order to receive some feedback or purvey product definition or development, service development or any forms of customer service and support. Similarly, an interactive communication between the current customers and the potential customers of a retail company is useful in order to exchange feedback about products and services or employees or sales section (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Furthermore, a retail firm can provide all of the marketing announcements such as sales directly to customers through a Social Network and Social Media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. An important strength of Social Media and Social Networks is that most of them are free of charge. Users can make their profile, add some friends, and communicate
with each other without any costs. In addition, most of the Social Networking sites have the ability of hiring. For example, lots of firms announce their hiring season through their Facebook or Twitter groups or especially LinkedIn, which is a mostly job-seeking site. The e-commerce or online shopping through Social Media and Social Networks or website of company is easier and customers can buy any product or service independently of the distance or hours. The most important benefit of Social Media and Social Networks is the increasing sales of a retail company. Business owners or managers of a retail firm can write posts that link to products, sales, etc. The ability to target particular audiences is one of the greatest benefits of Social Media (Roesler, 2014).

**Weaknesses**

A weakness of Social Media to retailers is that the Social Media department is time intensive. In a company, a responsible person needs to monitor each Social Media tool like Facebook, Instagram, etc., respond to customers, answer to potential questions or complaints from customers and post product and service information, which are valuable to customers. An important weakness of Social Media in retail businesses is lack of feedback. The negative responses or complaints from consumers or customers for either a product or a service or an employee or the brand as a whole can create a very depressing effect for the popularity of the company. So, the manager of Social Media needs to immediately respond and neutralize these harmful posts. Furthermore, lack of measuring results is considered as another weakness. Business owners and managers cannot measure and discover if it is worth to invest time and dedicate human resources and other resource in Social Media. It needs much time in order to see if the effects of Social Media have a positive benefit to reputation of the company or not (Fuchs, 2014; WebpageFX). In addition, information security is another important weakness of Social Media to retailers. Most of the companies should have a powerful firewall in order to avoid hacking of company’s information. So, this may increase the costs of the firm. Furthermore, a responsible person, the manager, have to monitor Social Media often because it is so easy for someone to pretend to be anyone. If the manager has not a Social Media presence, someone could pretend to act as the business which could cause great damage to reputation of the brand. Moreover, the most important weakness is the lack of face-to-face communication between the company and its customers. The Social Media manager communicates with the customers through Social Media and Social Networks such as Facebook, Instagram pages of the business. As a result, a trustworthy and face-to-face interaction is missing between company’s people and customers.

**Opportunities**

An important opportunity of Social Media in retail businesses is the presence of online communities where the company currently does not exist. For example, a retail company selling luxury fashion wear could be included in an online community, which indicates top five luxury brands in a specific area. Furthermore, the communication between individuals and companies is a great opportunity. Multiple individuals may ask upon several questions to a company for either products or services or prices or information of the company itself. Additionally, the spread of potential events or announcements is another opportunity of Social Media. For example, if a company organize a party for its employees and wants to invite other people too, then it can share the event through Facebook and provide multiple information for place or date of the
party, etc. Moreover, Social Media could provide more customers to a firm by advertisements or announcements for sales or other promotions.

 Threats

Viruses or malware can be risky to a company’s Social Media. A virus or malware could destroy all the electronic documents of the company’s Social Media and engender multiple risks such as hacking or cause virus damage to the company. In addition, weak economy of a country can be challenging for the retail industry. Specifically, Greece is going through an economic crisis, which affects the retail market and the customers of it. Although Social Media allow for communicating several sales or offers of a retail firm, the customers may not buy some products. In this way, Social Media and Social Networks could be ineffective. Similarly, the competitiveness is a threat too due to the multiple retail firms which sell similar products and services, so the customers are confused and choose fewer firms in order to buy some goods.

2.5 Social Media Technology in retail business

Social Media consist of a contemporary phenomenon, which is developed increasingly. There are several different interpretations regarding the definition of this concept. One approach of this phenomenon is that all forms of media are inherently social or they would not mediate messages between senders and receivers. In fact, there are three characteristics which make up what people usually mean by referring to Social Media: a) the technical aspects of Social Media including hardware such as smart phones or laptops; b) the content which includes the programs that make social networking possible such as Facebook or Twitter or Pinterest; c) the features of Web 2.0 which allow the Internet to be a means of interactive communication that has the greatest impact on other media industries and generally on people. From the economic perspective, Social Media have helped in creating a variety of new economic models, which are “hybrids” from legacy forms of media and some new ways of thinking about how Social Media are paid for and by whom. From the social perspective, there are several ways of looking at the impact and importance of Social Media ranging from the way someone thinks about democracy and political governance to sharing intimacies with those who are emotionally close to others.

Besides the variety of definitions, Social Media have become undivided components about how all the people communicate in our days and how people see themselves in relation with others (Hanson, 2016). Wozniak (2015) claims that Social Media have created an environment in which all the things seem to happen faster and faster and the biggest problem today is that people try to deal with how quickly change occurs. The speed of change is highlighted by Wozniak (2015) and his allegation suggests that people’s sense of place is changing rapidly. Specifically, the Internet allow people to be in one physical space and at the same time being in another space, as individuals send or receive messages from around the world. Social Media give people the ability to make friends, “follow” or text or connect with other people. In each of these communication contexts, Social Media accommodate the human interactions and increase the use of technologies for communication, which are shaped as tools to human interaction (Hanson, 2016).

Social Media have the ability to spread conversations to a wider audience. Of course, there are multiple communication channels in an organization or business including
meetings, phone calls, and emails. These channels have their own limitations like forgetting a message, not taking notes during a meeting, searching information in a big flow of emails. Therefore, the use of Social Media web sites has increased the channels of communication and its effectiveness in business. This is because now people easily send a message to a person through an instant messenger or a tweet and the response comes quickly (Edosomwan et al., 2011). But the most important part is that Social Media have increased the collaboration between team members and employees in a company in order to provide better outcomes. When a group of people is encouraged to work as a team, allowing them to share their workload, the outcome will be tremendous compared to what an individual could have created. At such situations, the social media act as a source to allow people to generate and share their ideas. Thus, communication and collaboration can increase the overall effectiveness of a team work (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

The industries that use social media to deliver their content have changed and continue to change. Some have become powerhouses for information access and transfer, and others have been short-lived, or acquired by larger companies and forced to change. But all of these industries have developed new economic models for effective delivery of content. We have come a long way since the Internet was developed with the purpose of allowing us to collaborate online from distances and the initial idea that the World Wide Web would allow scientists and educators to share knowledge. While these features still exist, the commercial aspects of social media industries have attracted the lion’s share of attention and have created the widest range of economic models for funding commercial services (Hanson, 2016).

Since last decades, when the commercial launches, generally the Internet has become the second most important distribution channel and a demanding source of customer information and empowerment (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). Over the last ten years, a new generation of online tools and applications such as blogs, wikis, online communities, forums, known as Social Media, distract the attention of practitioners and academics. Although many retail businesses integrate various forms of Social Media applications into their marketing strategies, less attention has been paid to strategic and commercial aspects of this phenomenon and especially its importance as a strategic marketing tool. The increasing importance of Internet as interactive communication tool and social interaction platform is highlighted in several studies (Beer and Burrows, 2007). Furthermore, with the aid of online applications and technologies, named as Social Media or Web 2.0, business processes, consumer behaviour and marketing practices are shaped (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). An increasing number of retail corporations were rushing to integrate various forms of Social Media in their marketing strategies (Constantinides, Romero and Boria, 2008). Furthermore, retail companies should view this phenomenon of Social Media as an integrated strategy which brings consumer experiences to forefront and expand the marketing ability to move customers from awareness to engagement, consideration and loyalty (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011). Additionally, a company which engages in Social Media strengthen its brand and becomes more attractive both to customers and to employees. Social Media help in building a good reputation for a business organization. Brand awareness depends on the experiences of the employees of a business. So, Social Media act such a powerful way to communicate the brand value and attribute to customers (Edosomwan et al., 2011).
Moreover, Brooks, Heffner and Henderson (2014) highlight the importance of Social Media in the current business environment. After reviewing the history of Social Network sites, which had the only ability of creating personal profiles and connecting to “friends” around 1990 (Boyd and Ellison, 2007) they mention that, after the appearance of Web 2.0 technology, an online environment of electronic media sharing and user generated content was created which was given the ability for users to create, aggregate, link and share created content instantly (O’Reilly, 2005). As a result, Social Media conversations took place towards several types of consumers such as the current customer, the prospective customer, the fan of a product or service and the critic of a product and service (Ramsay, 2010). Especially, the product brandling and the customer relationships are two business functions which are affected either positively or negatively by the way a company participate in these conversations. From these conversations, a demanding question is coming up: why consumers buy or not buy their products and services? So, the knowledge produced from these conversations should help in a positive way to impact the product branding and the customer relationships. Although these discourses are not just about product and service reviews during the purchase process, they are taking place during all the steps in the buying process. These steps are explicitly described by Court et al. (2009) as the “consumer decision journey” and include the following phases: consideration of certain products and services, evaluation of those products and services, selection and purchase of the products and services and experiencing the products and services (Brooks, Heffner and Henderson, 2014).

Furthermore, Social Networks gain a lot of popularity and have become the most preferred communication channel either for personal or business interaction (Ramsay, 2010). According to Van de Ketterij’s (2012) report regarding the current usage of Social Networking, most of the people all over the world spend one of every five minutes online in any kind of Social Networking environment. The companies should watch out the Social Media conversations and use them in order to create competitive knowledge; otherwise they will continue to lose any competitive advantage that may have (Ramsay, 2010). User generated content from Social Media sites has changed the way people buy products and services. As a result, an important potential impact on businesses is figured, as more and more customers find products and services from Social Media conversations (Court et al., 2009). Moreover, it is very important for employees to know the time and the way to respond to communications within Social Media environments because a lack of response or a negative response to complaints could damage seriously a business reputation. It is already known that Social Media spread information rapidly through self-replication. Social Networks have the integrated capability of replication and companies realize that a larger reach can be achieved using Social Networks in this manner (Phillips, McFadden and Sullins, 2010). As a result, “viral marketing” concept is beneficial to companies in order to reach different prospective consumer groups (Brooks, Heffner and Henderson, 2014). After reviewing the Social Media Technology in retail business, the description of Social Media types is presented.

First of all, collaborative projects consist of a touchable type of Social Media. In specific, these projects allow each user to add, remove or change text based content. It is widely known that throughout the collaborative efforts of different users the information offered by that source of Social Media is becoming more reliable. An example of collaborative project is Wikipedia. It is a free, web based and online encyclopaedia which is written with the common efforts of volunteers and is accessible by everyone, in
many languages and with an Internet access (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Furthermore, blogs are another type of Social Media. In fact, blogs allow users to publish and participate in multipersonal conversations online (Weber, 2009). Blogs can be important for firms because they can easily increase companies’ reputation in case of positive blogging, but at the same time decrease a good reputation in case of negative blogging (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Content communities are another type of Social Media which give people the opportunity to share media content between them. Media content means the exchange of videos (YouTube), photos (Flickr), or PowerPoint presentations (Slide Share). The users of these communities usually do not create a profile page, but they just have a personal record with their overall activity. Regarding companies, the content communities deal with a great threat due to the chance to be used as platforms for sharing copyright materials (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Moreover, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds are types of Social Media. Virtual game worlds refer to three dimensional environments where users interact with each other by taking the form of “avatars” and experiencing real world situations and provide the highest level of social presence and media richness (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Furthermore, virtual social worlds have a little difference for virtual game worlds. They allow users to choose their behaviour and live a life which is similar to their own ones. As in virtual game worlds, virtual social world users appear in the form of avatars and interact in a three-dimensional virtual environment but, in that case, there are no rules for the possible interactions, except for basic physical laws such as gravity (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

The most important type of Social Media is Social Networking sites. Through these sites, people interact by exchanging personal information, photos, videos or instant messages. Individuals can also invite friends to have access to their personal information. Most popular examples of Social Networking sites are Facebook and Twitter. Most of the companies are based on Facebook in order to attract more customers. Twitter is a free Social Network and micro blogging service that allows people to exchange posts, which are called “tweets” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

2.6 Social Networking sites

After presenting several types of Social Media and defining Social Networking sites as the most important type, popular and mostly used Social Networks are presented in combination with their SWOT Analysis for each of them.

2.6.1 Facebook

Facebook is a Social Networking site, which was launched in 2004. It is a creation of Mark Zuckerberg and others when he was student at Harvard. In 2010 already, Facebook had more than 500 million active users. In 2009, Facebook was awarded as the most used Social Media worldwide. The users can create their profile, add other known or unknown people as friends, exchange messages, post pictures, play games and comment to others. In the meantime, Facebook users could join user groups, which were created in order to represent...
teams, music stars, a school year or a group with common interests (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Particularly, Facebook may be accessed by personal desktop, laptops, tablets and smartphones over the Internet and mobile networks. An individual, after registering in order to use the site, can create a personal profile including name, age, place of birth, schools attended, occupation, professional experience, etc. Users can also add other users as “friends”, exchange messages with them, post status updates and upload photos, share digital videos or links and use several software applications. Moreover, users can join multiple Facebook groups, which are common-interest user groups and organized by schools or celebrities or companies or others. Users have the ability to control their security policy and block unpleasant people (Wikipedia, 2017e).

Regarding the business perspective, companies started to create pages for them in order to promote and advertise their brands name, products and services (Edosomwan et al., 2011). For many companies, Facebook is considered as an economic and successful way of marketing. Currently, Facebook is the largest and most influential Social Network and allows a big proportion of people to be affected for research and promotions. As a result, retailers who want to engage and attract more consumers have a big reach on Facebook (Brennan and Schafer, 2010). Although most retailers use Facebook in order to communicate promotions, the most important use is to build loyal relationships with customers. Social Networking sites have become amplifiers for businesses and especially Facebook is an effective one. The interconnectivity of its members towards their ability to loud their opinions and share product or brand preferences and purchasing decisions, give the retailers a great opportunity to connect with their customers (Brennan and Schafer, 2010). For these reasons, this study focuses on Facebook page of the case company. A SWOT analysis of Facebook regarding retail business aspects is illustrated in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• most popular Social Network site</td>
<td>• loss of face-to-face communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “LIKE” option</td>
<td>• detraction of a company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• integration with websites and applications</td>
<td>• lack of customer’s privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• marketing action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• understanding customer’s needs and behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• advertising through Facebook</td>
<td>• impersonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• increase of recruitments</td>
<td>• risk of competitiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• lack of security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: A SWOT analysis of Facebook in retail business

**Strengths**

The most important strength of Facebook in retail business is that it is the most popular Social Network site. Over a billion of people have registered in Facebook so the
consumers are mostly online and search everyday about several retail companies in order to buy products and services. In addition, Facebook has a “LIKE” option, which is selected by the user who likes a status of another user. In particular, a consumer can “like” a status of a retail company which is about offers or promotions or discounts. As a result, the retail company can have an external view of the posts regarding the popularity. Moreover, most websites of retail companies ask from users their Facebook page in order to sign up to website and not necessarily providing their personal information. As a result, customers sign up faster and easier to websites in order to shop online if they want. Similarly, a lot of companies which have applications for their websites, access is easier through Facebook login. Of course, Facebook page is a core reason for marketing action in retail businesses because retail firms can advertise either products or services or offers through this page and attract more and more customers (Hitesh, 2016). Furthermore, retail companies can have a holistic overview of behaviour and needs of customers because of the comments or “likes” of Facebook users. Consumers, depending on their actions, may affect a firm’s decisions or discounts scale.

Weaknesses

The most important weakness of Facebook in retail companies is the loss of face-to-face communication with customers. A retail business has online contact with customers, thus the face-to-face communication is missing and trustworthiness is reduced. As a result, Facebook has a lot of fake profiles, which could damage a company with detraction or by providing negative feedback for it (Hitesh, 2016). Moreover, as more customers provide feedback in the Facebook page of a retail company, more hackers could hack customer’s profiles and damage their personal information. So, the lack of privacy is visible and may cause serious problems to online users.

Opportunities

The most important opportunity of Facebook is that retail companies could advertise either products or services or brand through this Social Network site. There are some banners for advertisements in Facebook pages, thus every retail company could have revenue from this. Another demanding opportunity of Facebook is that either in Social Media department of a retail company or through advertisements for seeking people, the hiring process could be increased. More people are needed for the department of Social Media in a retail firm in order to check out the feedbacks or requests from online customers. Although there are multiple sites which are responsible for advertising jobs from companies, companies have the chance to seek people for them through their own Facebook page (Hitesh, 2016).

Threats

An important threat of Facebook site to retail companies is the impersonation. Many people pretend to be someone else in order to harm the real person or gain something from the real person. Thus, a fake person could give a negative feedback to the Facebook page of a retail firm in order to affect other consumers too or damage the reputation of the company (Hitesh, 2016). But, this fake person could be a competitor, who is engaged with similar retail company and wants to damage another retail company. So, the risk of competitiveness is increasing. Similarly, the competitiveness is increasing due to the plethora of Facebook pages of retail firms in order to confuse and distract the customer from one business to another one. Furthermore, security is a
central issue as well. Information leakage, cyber attacks, spamming, and fraud can lead to significant revenue loss and decreased customer trust. Facebook is an attractive target for attacks because of its status. Any failure of service as a result of any attack would harm retail firm’s reputation and reliability.

2.6.2 Instagram

Instagram is a mobile photo-sharing application and service, which allows users to share pictures, videos and stories in public or in private as well as through multiple other Social Networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Flickr. An additional main feature of Instagram is that it allows users to upload pictures with digital filters within them. Historically, Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and was launched in 2010 as a free mobile application (Wikipedia, 2017f).

Particularly, people can register to Instagram and make a profile with various personal information, such as name, age and a free description of each person. The users can upload photos and videos in their page and show friend’s photos and videos too. The option of “making friends” is accessible and open. Moreover, users can see uploads of photos and videos from friends who are followed by their friends, without knowing them. Of course, the option of block an annoying person exists. Users also, can connect their Instagram account to other Social Networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. enabling them to share photos and videos to those sites too. The chat is an option too between friends of Instagram and comments in a photo or video are allowed (Wikipedia, 2017f; Buck, 2012; Frommer, 2010).

In 2013, Instagram introduced a feature named “Instagram Direct” which allows users to send photos only to a specific user or group of users, rather than it could be viewable by all. In 2016, the mobile photo-sharing application announced the launch of new tools for business accounts, including new business profiles, analytics and the ability to turn Instagram posts into advertisements directly for the Instagram application itself. Thus, retail businesses created pages of their company in order to promote either their brands or sales or advertisements (Wikipedia, 2017f). For these reasons, this study focuses on Instagram page of the case company. A SWOT analysis of Instagram regarding retail business aspects is illustrated in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strengths</strong></th>
<th><strong>Weaknesses</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sharing beautiful images</td>
<td>loss of face-to-face communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hashtags</td>
<td>reduced use of Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comments possibility/like function</td>
<td>all comments are public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing stories/videos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marketing possibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct messaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Opportunities</strong></th>
<th><strong>Threats</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>control of followers</td>
<td>increasing of competition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: A SWOT analysis of Instagram in retail business
Strengths

The most important strength of Instagram in retail businesses is the nature and the value of this mobile photo-sharing application. Companies use Instagram to upload their products or promote a discount process with an inspiring and beautiful picture in order to attract the customer and increase the sales of the products. Many times customers are affected by a smart photo and want to touch the product and see it live from the online photo. So, the retail company find new touch points for reaching and communicating with their audiences. An enjoying strength of Instagram is the hashtags. Hashtags capitalize on real-time trends and become timelier in several places. Furthermore, the customers can comment on or like a firm’s photos or videos, so the images and videos create a more friendly and active spirit. Another strength of Instagram in retail business is the story option. The companies can use the stories option in order to show beautiful and daily moments at the company with employees. In addition, many products of each retail business could be promoted through Instagram, pointing features of products. Lastly, customers have the possibility to send a private message to company in order to make a question, thus the connection between employees and customers is getting better.

Weaknesses

A first and important weakness of Instagram is the lack of face-to-face communication. Customers watch the products of a retail company through this Social Network and do not have a close connection with employees of the company. Also, many people do not have Instagram accounts, thus companies lose the chance of attracting them for their products. Furthermore, the comments are made in a picture or video are public and there is no chance of privacy, unless the messages are on Direct Messaging.

Opportunities

Instagram gives the possibility to retail companies watch and control its followers and their frequency. The employees of each company, who are responsible for Social Networks, can check how often users watch their updates and if they like them. Thus, companies can watch the resonance of a product too in order to have a view of promotion of its products.

Threats

Although Instagram consists of an enjoyable Social Network, more and more companies have accounts on it, so the competition is increasing. Companies are getting hard in promoting and selling their products to a broader audience.

2.6.3 Twitter

Twitter is an online news and social networking service where users are able to post and interact with messages, called “tweets”, restricted to 140 characters. Registered users post tweets, but those who have not registered can only read them. This Social Network site was created in 2006 by Jack Dorsey Noah Glass, Biz Stone and Evan Williams.

Figure 7: Twitter (Wikipedia, 2017g)
This service was rapidly become popular worldwide and in 2012, more than 100 million users posted 340 million tweets per day. Tweets are publicly visible, but users have the possibility of restricting message delivery to followers only. Users can subscribe to other users, called as “following”, and subscribers are called as “followers”. Also, individual tweets can be re-posted by other users to their own feed, called as “retweet”. Users can “like” or “favourite” individual’s tweets and can update their profile either through mobile phones or through smartphones or tablets. Twitter has been updated with the aid of posting pictures or videos from users in order to share any personal moment (Wikipedia, 2017g; Stone, 2009). Regarding retail businesses, they have profiles in Twitter in order to promote products or services and offers. Twitter is very popular Social Network, thus retail businesses have positive results in promoting their brands. A SWOT analysis of Twitter regarding retail businesses is illustrated in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- simple use by everyone</td>
<td>- loss of face-to-face communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- free use of Twitter</td>
<td>- control of comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- use of “retweets”</td>
<td>- control of comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- comments</td>
<td>- control of comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- increasing framework</td>
<td>- competition of other Social Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- popular use for marketing reasons</td>
<td>- possibility of interception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: A SWOT analysis of Twitter in retail business

**Strengths**

Twitter is a popular Social Network site, which consists of several strengths. First of all, its use is very simple. Elderly people or any other, who is not familiar with Social Networks or Social Media, can easily get access and use Twitter in daily basis. So, users can easily search for a brand name or a retail company that is favourite. Another strength of Twitter is the free use of cost by users. Companies as users pay nothing in order to have a useful promoted account. The use of “retweets” is a very strong option for users because of repeating a post of a user. If a retail company posts a product or a service, then a user can retweet it and make this post broader. In the same sense, users can easily make comments too in a post from a favourite retail company.

**Weaknesses**

Twitter has several weaknesses too regarding retail firms. The loss of face-to-face communication is a demanding weakness as well as with the other Social Networks. Consumers lose their contact with a company’s employees and get in touch through Twitter or any other Social Network. Furthermore, the comments are made by users are not checked regularly, so any negative comment would be embarrassing for any company.

**Opportunities**

Twitter is already popular worldwide with 319 online users (Wikipedia, 2017g) and is becoming more popular over the years by including more and more functions.
Additionally, Twitter is used by retail companies in order to promote their brand names or products or services and has a successful result in their marketing plans.

**Threats**

An important threat of Twitter is the use of many other Social Networks like Facebook, Linked In, etc. All these sites, including Twitter, are used for marketing reasons from retail businesses and the competition is being increased. As a result, users have the chance of choosing many other Social Network sites in order to have fun or learn news about favourite retail firms. Another important threat is the possibility of interception of products by other competitors. A retail company which posts and promotes a product or service risks due to the chance of another company to “steal” this idea or concept for its own profit.

2.6.4 YouTube

YouTube is a video-sharing website, which is headquartered in San Bruno, California. This service was created by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim in 2005. In 2006, Google bought the site and now is operated as one of Google’s subsidiaries. In specific, YouTube allows users to upload, view, rate, share, add to favourites, report, comment on videos and subscribe to other users (Wikipedia, 2017h).

It uses WebM, H.264.MPEG-4 AVC and Adobe Flash Player technologies in order to display a wide variety of user generated content videos. Available content consists of video clips, TV shows, music videos, short or documentary films, audio recordings, movies or movie trailers. Most of the content is uploaded by individuals, but some media corporations such as CBS, BBC, VEVO, etc. upload some material via YouTube in order to promote their work. The unregistered users are able to watch videos only, while the registered users are able to upload an unlimited number of videos and comment to videos. Of course, YouTube permits the subscription for users 18 years old plus in order to upload or watch videos (Wikipedia, 2017h; Oreskovic, 2012). A SWOT analysis of YouTube regarding retail businesses is illustrated in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• simple search engine by everyone</td>
<td>• lack of controlling the comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• free use of YouTube</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• function of “sharing”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Google support</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• audio/visual functions</td>
<td>• competition of other companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• popular use for marketing reasons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: A SWOT analysis of YouTube in retail business
Strengths

YouTube consists of a very simple Social Network tool which is responsible for watching several kinds of videos like video clips, TV movies, etc. The users can use this tool with the easiest way, just searching in the “search tab” with the keywords of the video they are looking for. Also, the specific tool is without any cost, so the retail companies can freely advertise and promote any products or services. The important function of “sharing” a video with other Social Networks make each product more known and desirable to customers. Thus, each employee can easily share with his Social Network any product or service that his/her company has. The comments consist of an interesting possibility of making the company broader. An important strength of YouTube is that it is being supported by Google. So, when a person likes any specific product or service of a company, then he or she presents the potential video of that company, if such video exists.

Weaknesses

A demanding weakness of YouTube is that the comments are made by the users are not being controlled or checked and can create damage to a retail company. Although, most of the times comments are important feedback for the company, sometimes the negative feedback are viewed and may cause negative popularity to the company.

Opportunities

YouTube has the audio/visual function which is very interesting in promoting products and services of a company. The users and potential customers have the chance to watch a product by different sides or ideas. Additionally, YouTube is a very famous Social Network and helps a lot in marketing plan of a retail company.

Threats

An important threat of YouTube is the use of it from many other companies. All companies would upload several videos in order to promote their products and services and attract more customers. As a result, users have the chance of choosing many other similar companies in order to choose and buy from another company’s product or service.

2.6.5 LinkedIn

LinkedIn consists of a business oriented social networking service which operates through website and mobile or tablet application. LinkedIn was created in 2002 and is mainly used for professional networking, including both employers posting jobs and job seekers posting their CVs. In 2016, LinkedIn had more than 467 million accounts in 200 countries (Wikipedia, 2017i; LinkedIn, 2015).

LinkedIn allows both workers and employers to create profiles and connect with each other in an online Social Network, which could be a professional environment. All members can invite anyone to become a connection. Of course, many companies all
over the world create profiles in order to post regularly anything about their products and services or especially any recruits (Wikipedia, 2017i). A SWOT analysis of LinkedIn regarding retail businesses is illustrated in Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• professional social networking site</td>
<td>• lack of Social Media platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• promotion platform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• professional profiles</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• increasing professional status of company</td>
<td>• competition of other companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• upcoming changes</td>
<td>• competition of finding other jobs’ sites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: A SWOT analysis of LinkedIn in retail business

**Strengths**

The most important strength of LinkedIn is that it is considered as the number one site about professional social networking. This site is like job seeker for users who search for a job or hiring people for employers who search for employees. This site includes professional profiles either from companies or individuals and is best for marketing reasons. Companies are able to promote their brands and products or services with a strong advantage, but users can promote themselves in order to work in a company they want. The professional profiles include whole CVs from individuals. Employers find potential employees easily through these LinkedIn CVs.

**Weaknesses**

LinkedIn is viewed most of the times as a career portal platform and not as a Social Media platform. Globally, this site is considered as a recruitment platform and is not used to make friends or connect to others for friendly issues.

**Opportunities**

Companies have the chance to increase their professional status by making an account in LinkedIn and post several advertisements. The professional status of the site itself helps companies to promote better the products and services and attract more customers. However, there will be changes in LinkedIn in order to help in finding jobs, recruit employees, having fun and making professional friends too.

**Threats**

An important threat of LinkedIn is the use of it from many other companies. All companies would make professional accounts in order to promote their products and services and attract more customers. As a result, users have the chance of choosing many other similar companies in order to choose and buy another product or service. In the same way, many other sites about looking for a job or looking for employees exist, so the competition is increasing and maybe less people join LinkedIn.
2.7 Communication in Social Media and Social Networks

All the aforementioned Social Networking sites create a communication framework between people worldwide. Social Media and Social Networks consist of a communication tool. Generally, communication consists of a great deal of human activity. Reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing or creating images are acts of communication. Also, there are many communication activities which may be conscious or unconscious such as expression, gesture, body language and sounds. The process or framework of communication has been the subject of study for thousands of years, during which time the process has come to be appreciated with increasing complexity. Although communication is ubiquitous, different individuals define communication in different ways depending on their interests. In specific, Dale (1969) claims that communication is the sharing of ideas and feelings in a mood of mutuality. Keyton (2011) states that communication is the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. These definitions are influenced by the aspect of human behaviour.

According to Baruah (2012), Social Media refer to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. These technologies are used extensively for the purpose of communication. In the era of Social Media and Social Networking, most of the people depend on different Social Media and Social Networks in order to keep in touch with other individuals. In fact, the online sharing of knowledge and information, which consists of an important advantage of Social Networks, promotes the increasing of communication skills among people. Online communication tools have the potential to increase our awareness of the movements of our social or professional contacts. For instance, twitter, offers a contiguous update of daily activities of people. This phenomenon has been referred as “social proprioception” by Clive Thompson (2007), who defined that as a mean of knowing where the nodes of our community are and provides a sense of connectedness and awareness of others without direct communication. Additionally, Social Networking sites and virtual environments have become online meeting spaces where users can interact with each other and express themselves. They offer a way to communicate with existing communities that users belong to like social or professional groups. Also, they allow people to communicate by avoiding distance barrier for example. YouTube is another representation of online communication which is focused on sharing preferences or cultures. The visitors can browse movies or video clips and express their personal preferences or upload their own work. In addition, it is a repository of popular culture with view of newscasts or television shows depending on the viewer’s preferences.

Furthermore, Choudhury et al. (2010) reveal that there are several ways in which online Social Media has revolutionized our manner of social communication. Specifically, they present some of the main characteristics of this widespread change of the communication process:

- **Reach**: Social Media communication provides scale and enables anyone to reach a global audience.
- **Accessibility**: Social Media communication tools are available to anyone at no or less cost, transforming every individual who participates in the online social interaction into a publisher and broadcaster of information content.
✓ **Usability**: Most Social Media do not need any specialized skills and training by people in order to use them, so anyone can operate the means of content production and communication.

✓ **Recency**: Social Media communication is capable of quick responses, making the communication process extremely reciprocate.

✓ **Permanence**: Unlike industrial media communication, which once created, cannot be altered. Social Media communication is very unsettled because it can be altered instantly by comments or voting.

But Social Media and Social networks may have several disadvantages or risks in the context of communication (Helen and Nahar, 2011). For example, misinterpretation and misunderstanding in communication in electronic environment usually happens due to the absence of body language. Furthermore, it is difficult and time consuming to express everything in electronic form while communicating. In addition, some people can write quickly and correctly whereas another person could be slower in typing correctly. People send lots of irrelevant messages and inquiries and the main topic is missing. Moreover, the communication or information overload could ruin productivity or the main scope of Social Media and Networks. There are so many different Social Media tools which are used by different people and it is time and energy consuming in using them as well as a pressure for keeping the social media site updated. Another important disadvantage is the risk from viruses or online frauds, which could destroy computers or laptops or tablets or smartphones. Lastly, stress, bullying and addiction in Social Media and networks could be worse in human productivity and generally in human daily life.

### 2.7.1 Communication in retail businesses through Social Media and Social Networks

Although Social Media and Social Networks have the capability of building personal relationships, these technologies are used in companies to perform a variety of business related tasks. The boundary between using Social Media for work and for play continues to blur (Bond, 2010). Many companies have adopted over the years Social Media technologies and are leveraging them for several purposes such as communication or marketing reasons (Buechler, 2010; Cardon and Okoro, 2010; Naslund, 2010; Pervaje, 2011). This assimilation of Social Media tools into the workplace has led to a fundamental shift in how firms run their businesses (Bulmer and DiMauro, 2009; Gossieaux and Moran, 2010). While companies implement Social Media tools, then they are shaping their “business processes into social processes” (Gossieaux and Moran, 2010). In fact, firms add a human relationship aspect into business transactions and customer service (D’Aprix, 2011). Also, Social Media are part of a shift away from simple information channels and towards networks of knowledge. These tools serve as a central repository in order to gather and analyze information, while promoting collaboration between users during the decision-making process (Buechler, 2010).

The majority of companies worldwide incorporate Social Media tools in their external communication with the public and internal communication with employees. Simply using Social Media to engage the public is no guarantee of corporate success. Vorvoreanu (2009) investigated that college students are wary of corporations that leverage Social Networks and are suspicious of these organizations’ reasons for doing so. However, the same group of students noted that they will engage with corporations on Social Networks if the interaction: a) helps them communicate with friends via gifts
or applications, b) helps them express their personal identity (via likes or dislikes) or c) offers a discounted or free of cost product and service. The true value of Social Networks within the workplace is not the technology itself, but the types of behaviors these tools promote between employees and even between company leaders and frontline workers (Pervaje, 2011). Corporate Social Networks can help businesses improve knowledge sharing and collaboration between employees, reinforce their brand, generate new ideas, and build a sense of community (Naslund, 2010). The importance of these collaborative behaviors cannot be overstated. The collaborative behaviors that Social Networks promote can lead to increased productivity among employees and this increased productivity allows companies to deliver more goods and services with fewer people, presumably leading to increased profit margins. However, irrelevant and excessive communications will have opposite impacts. Irrelevant communication will not let the business task in hand done. Excessive communication will consume time that is needed to get the task in hand done.

Specific types of Social Media such as online communities and forums enable companies to collaborate with stakeholders regarding several business activities, like product and service innovation, communication improvement and customer service. Social Media facilitate better engagement between a business and its audience as they allow everyone who associated with the company to be an active part of the company’s online activities (Postman, 2009). Also, Social Media are a means for the company to provide its audience with richer user experiences like different media technologies (video or live streaming).

Moreover, Social Media and Social Networks can become a powerful tool for businesses regarding the corporate communication. They influence companies’ communication activities and results in increased authenticity, transparency, immediacy, connectedness and participation. Communication activities of all companies experience so much authenticity due to the amount of unfiltered and spontaneous information coming from numerous Social Media tools of each company (Postman, 2009). Stakeholders’ need for increased transparency is also satisfied through Social Media as companies are able to share valuable information in public to anyone. Furthermore, communication becomes more immediate with Social Media tools as it is happening at lighting speed. In fact, firms are able to express themselves instantly that makes the communication more current and relevant for their audience. Of course, this immediacy can happen outside of company’s control in blogs or online communities or Social Networks by users with writing either positive or negative comments for it. Related to this immediacy is also connectedness as messages are more widely distributed through social media and other technologies which make recipients more connected despite being more geographically dispersed. Social Media are increasing external audiences’ participation in companies’ corporate communication activities. On companies’ blogs, forums, Social Networks pages, consumers can comment, ask questions or help other consumers. In result, many “loyal” customers of a company may assist other consumers by solving any questions or problems. So, the increased participation provides into companies new inputs and allows users to be involved and valued and as a result, the perception of the company and its brand is improving. Companies’ presence in Social Media affects both them and their stakeholders significantly. With the right focus and strategy, many possibilities are available to the companies which can result in competitive advantages and company growth if applied in a successful way. In Figure 10, a communication model is presented by Blackshaw and Nazzaro, (2004).
Of course, Social Media and Social Networks may have some difficulties or risks in applying them in retail businesses regarding the communication factor. The most important risk for a company is the negative comments of customers or followers or competitors. For example, a post on Facebook could be liked many times, but a negative comment will be the focus of the managers of the company and the rest of the followers. A negative comment could damage the reputation of the company or sales of the item against which the negative comment has been made. Furthermore, the experience and skills for using Social Media and Social networks could be high and difficult for people to gain and learn them. So, companies are getting hard to find a skillful and network-oriented person in order to handle these media.

2.8 Information and Knowledge Management through Social Media and Social Networks

One of my research questions is dealing with information and knowledge management by the Social Media. Therefore, knowledge management theories have been reviewed and utilized in this study. Knowledge is always one of the key strategic resources of a company which can produce sustained long-term competitive advantage. According to Gaal et al. (2015, p. 185), “knowledge is the ability of people and organizations to understand and act effectively”. The exchange of information and knowledge among employees is a vital part of knowledge management in businesses. People are able to make use of social media tools in order to increase range and richness of their networks, gather information and nowadays, increasingly organizations are finding ways of integrating social media into their business processes (Gaal et al., 2015).

As aforementioned, knowledge is a strategic resource of organizational performance. Either located in the minds of individuals (tacit knowledge) (Polanyi, 1966), embedded in organizational norms, or codified in technological devices (explicit knowledge)
(Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), knowledge enables the development of new competences (Choo, 1998). Knowledge management describes the processes of acquiring, developing, sharing, exploiting and protecting organizational knowledge in order to help in organization’s competitiveness. Regarding the definition of Knowledge Management, Grey (1996) claimed that knowledge management is a collaborative and integrated approach to the creation, capture, organization, access and use of a company’s intellectual assets. Moreover, Information Week (2003) supported that knowledge management is the concept under which information is turned into actionable knowledge and made available effortlessly in a usable form to people who can apply it. The recognition of knowledge as a key factor in the achievement of competitive advantage is making it critical to understand and develop effective approaches to knowledge management. In Figure 11, the activities of the integrated knowledge management cycle by Dalkir (2005) are illustrated in order to explain the overall knowledge management process.

![Figure 11: The integrated knowledge management cycle (Dalkir, 2005)](image)

Several researches have been conducted regarding Social Media tools and knowledge management. Dumbrell and Steele (2014) presented an informal knowledge management framework based on the system capabilities present in Social Media technologies as well as the requirements of older adult users. The system capabilities distinctive to Social Media technologies are: public peer-to-peer sharing, content evaluation amongst peers, and the “push” nature of these systems. Moreover, Behringer and Sassenberg (2015) studied the relation between importance of knowledge exchange, deficits in knowledge exchange, perceived usefulness of Social Media for knowledge exchange, as well as Social Media experience on the one hand and the intention to use knowledge exchange technology on the other hand. The results showed that the interplay between the importance and deficits concerning knowledge exchange, perceived usefulness of Social Media for knowledge exchange, and experience in Social Media use jointly affected the intention to apply Social Media for knowledge exchange after their implementation. Lastly, Sigalaa and Chalkiti (2015) investigated the relation between Social Media use and employee creativity by adopting a knowledge management approach in order to consider the influence of Social Networks and interactions on individuals’ creativity. Their findings highlight the need to shift focus from identifying and managing creative individuals (micro level) or organisational contexts (macro level) to creating and managing creative Social Networks (meso level). The use of Social Media for externalising, disseminating and discussing information with others within various Social Networks as well as for combining and generating
shared knowledge can further trigger, enrich and expand the employees’ individual cognitive abilities and provide them with stimuli for generating and creating more and newer knowledge.

However, several disadvantages or risks could be faced regarding Information and Knowledge Management through Social Media and Social Networks (Samoilenko and Nahar, 2012; 2013). Firstly, knowledge could be scattered in various Social Media and as a result it is difficult to be managed and utilized. Also, the tacit knowledge is difficult to be managed using Social Media or other ICTs. An important risk is that any computer and Social Media can be hacked in where some of the important knowledge is stored. Of course, regarding individual perspective, some people are unwilling to share knowledge and as a result the information does not spread.

2.9 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse the relevant literature in the field which are connected with the research problem of this thesis. Specifically, Web 2.0, Social Media, Social Networks, Resource Development and Risk of Competitiveness were defined and explained in detail.

Social Media and Social Networks are similar concepts which are always confused by individuals. So, a detailed analysis of these terms was necessary in order to show the differences and the confusion around them. Also, the implementation of Web 2.0 in retail business was reported in order to illustrate several uses of this term in any kind of retail business. A SWOT analysis of Social Media in retail business was very important too, because with the help of this tool, several features of Social Media were represented.

Another important content was the use of Social Media technology in retail business which has evolved over the years as well as the types of Social Media technology. Furthermore, some examples of well-known Social Networking sites were presented in combination with a SWOT analysis for each of them. The readers should understand better the use of each Social Network depending on the aim of use.

Lastly, communication and knowledge management theories were used in this literature review because Social Media and Social Networks are totally connected with them. The readers should comprehend the reasons of this connection as well as the benefits of these theories.
3 Research Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology applied in the empirical part of the study. Section 3.1 presents the research paradigm that guides the research. In section 3.2 an analysis of research approaches has been conducted and their suitability for the examination of the research questions has been discussed. An in-depth analysis of the case study method is included in section 3.3, and the reasons behind the selection of a single case study method for examining the research questions. In section 3.4, the research design has been described that includes the selection of the case company and interviewees, data collection methods and qualitative data analysis techniques. Section 3.5 describes the variety of measures that have been taken in this research to ensure the validity and reliability of this research. In section 3.6, the ethical considerations are explained. Lastly, this chapter discusses the methodological limitations of the research and strategies deployed to overcome them.

3.1 Research Paradigms

A research paradigm is a set of beliefs, values techniques which are shared by members of a scientific community, and which acts as a guide or map dictating the kinds of problems scientist should address and the types of explanation that are acceptable (Kuhn, 1970). Regarding the philosophical assumptions of Information Systems, positivism, interpretivism and the critical one are the three underlying approaches which specify how to study and understand several phenomena, how to seek answers for them and how to analyze their results, as they have different ontological and epistemological background (Myers and Avison, 2002; Myers, 1997; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). According to Guba (1990), paradigms can be characterised through their: “ontology (What is reality?), epistemology (How do you know something?) and methodology (How do go about finding out?)”. The concept of ontology gives an explanation of what constitutes reality, as this reality is composed by objectivism or subjectivism and depends on people and personal beliefs about an issue (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). On the other hand, epistemology can be defined as the science or theory of knowledge and refers to the assumptions about knowledge and how it can be obtained, which essentially guides the research (Myers, 1997).

Analytically, in positivism paradigm, the reality is objectively given and is independent of the observer and his instrument while relied on quantitative data. In addition, the positivism perspective claims that the examined phenomenon is single and there is only a unique description of any chosen aspect of the phenomenon (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Furthermore, in interpretive paradigm, the phenomenon is being understood through the meaning that people assign to them and the reality is socially constructed (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Also, the interpretive perspective attempts to understand the intersubjective meaning embedded in social life and to make more comprehensible why the under examined people act the way they actually do (Gibbons, 1987). Lastly, the critical paradigm claims that reality is produced and reproduced by people as it focuses on oppositions because of people who have the ability to change social and economic circumstances. According to Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), the critical perspective is related with the creation of awareness to make more understandable the multiple forms of the social domination.
Specifically, the positivist paradigm is not adopted in this research because the study is based on qualitative data than quantitative data. Also, this study does not support the critical perspective since the main aim is not to arise the inequalities among the under examined phenomenon in order to act as an emancipator, but to explore several different worldviews that the participants explain and afterwards to provide suggestions for improving a problematic situation. So, the interpretive paradigm is used in this study because I attempt to understand the phenomenon through the meanings that interviewees assign to this. Interpretivism claims that knowledge of reality is a social construction of human actors, and that the researcher uses his or her preconceptions in order to guide the research process (Walsham, 1995). The aim of interpretive research is to understand the way that members of a social group, through their participation in social procedures, enact their realities and endow them with meaning and to show how these meanings, beliefs and intentions help in constituting their social behavior (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Moreover, the interpretive paradigm is useful in this study because, as Klein and Myers (1999) claim, an IS/IT research can be characterized as interpretive when the knowledge of reality comes through social interaction such as language, experiences, consciousness.

3.2 Research Approach

There are two research approaches: qualitative and quantitative approaches. To carry out a research study the researcher chooses one of these two approaches based on the research paradigm which is chosen (Myers, 1997).

Regarding quantitative approach, the researcher deals with large amount of data which need to be analyzed with the use of statistical tools in order to extract some results for the examined phenomenon. Thus, this approach is mostly connected with the positivist paradigm due to seeking an objectivist knowledge which could be analyzed via statistical tools. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) claimed that quantitative researchers are independent from the research process and the participants, while trying to find any clues for the examined phenomenon. On the other hand, regarding qualitative approach, the researcher collects meanings that participants assign to a phenomenon and brings personal values into the study, while in a quantitative research approach the researcher mostly tests theories, measure and observe information in a numerically way (Creswell, 2008). The researcher should follow the qualitative approach when studying social and cultural phenomena which are complex and non-measurable (Myers and Avison, 2002).

The qualitative research approach is selected because it is used to comprehend social and cultural phenomenon (Myers, 1997), as well as for other reasons described below and the characteristics of this present research project. Qualitative research approach deals with understanding and collecting the opinions, motivations and meanings of participants and brings personal values into the study. A qualitative based research strives for a holistic analysis of a phenomenon. The qualitative research approach is likely to lean on unstructured interviews, participative observations, and diverse documents for non-statistical analysis (Lee, Liebenau and DeGross, 1997; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Nahar, 2001). In this approach, the phenomenon under investigation is analyzed in its natural context as a whole (Denzin and Yvonna, 1994; Marshall and Gretchen, 1994; Mason, 1997; Maxwell, 1996; Nahar, 2001). In contrast, a quantitative research approach is about testing theories or explanations and observing information numerically (Creswell, 2003). A quantitative based research collects data through
surveys and systematic observations which is then used for statistical analysis and low-like inference (Creswell, 1994).

### 3.3 Research Method

A case study method is a rigorous scientific method (Lee, 1989). According to Yin (1994), “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”.

This study uses case study method, as it allows an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon and also for the reasons mentioned below. A case study establishes exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. Moreover, case studies ensure that the issue is not explored in only one way, but rather through a variety of lenses which allow for the multiple views in which one phenomenon can be understood (Baxter and Jack, 2008). So, in this study, I use a qualitative case study method as it is helpful for a detailed analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 1997). Case study examines the relationships between a new phenomenon and a real-life situation when the boundaries of these two are not yet evident.

Baxter and Jack (2008) and Yin (2003) state that “the qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts”. Stake (1995) and Creswell (2008) refer that the researchers explore deeply a program or an event or an activity or a process or one or more individuals. The case is bounded by time and activity and researchers collect information in detail using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. Furthermore, Yin (2003) claims that a case study methodology should be used when the following conditions are existed. Firstly, the focus of the study is to answer questions of “how” and “why” and the researcher does not misquote the behavior of the involved people in the study. The researcher needs to cover coherent conditions due to the belief that they are relevant with the under-researched study and the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

There are two types of case study research methods. One is single case study and the other is multiple case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1984). The current study utilizes an exploratory single case study method (Yin, 1994).

In this research, an exploratory case study is used because it explores a single social unit which provides a deep insight and a better understanding through empirical evidence collected from a real life case company. The study answers the research questions which are formulated from the research problem and the objectives of the study. Additionally, I support my arguments relying on previous studies providing multiple facets of the topic and also examples from real life support as well my research. This study uses a combination of interviews and observation procedures for empirical data collection. The interviews are conducted with highly knowledgeable managers of the case company in order to have multiple of lenses for the research problem and questions and collect the most appropriate and high quality information. The work experience of the managers ranges between ten and twenty years and are engaged with the sales department, the Social Media department and the management of sales and Social Media information. The study uses a single case study.
Researchers claim that a case study research is one of the most common qualitative methods used in Information Systems (Alavi and Carlson, 1992; Benbasat, Goldstein and Mead, 1987; Lee, 1989; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). There are several examples of the use of a case method in the information systems (information technology) literature (Cavaye and Cragg, 1995; Curtis, Krasner and Iscoe, 1988.; Damsgaard and Lyttinen, 1998; Earl, 1993; Goodhue et al., 1992; Markus, 1983; Nahar, 2001; Nahar et al., 2006; Pare and Elam, 1997; Robey and Sahay, 1996; Shanks, 1997). Several researchers (Bandow, 1997; Lovatt, 1997; Muller and Pischel, 1999; Skok, 1999; Walker, 1997) have utilized the single case study method to execute research studies.

Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden (2011) explored the online Social Media as an ecosystem of related elements involving both digital and traditional media. They used the case study research method of an organization in order to highlight its efforts to leverage Social Media for reaching an important audience of young consumers. He, Zha and Li (2013) researched the performance of a Social Media competitive analysis and the transformation of Social Media data into knowledge for the decision makers. They used case study research strategy as well in order to describe in-depth the application of text mining and to analyze unstructured text content on Facebook and Twitter for three top pizza companies.

3.4 Research Design

To effectively contribute in the Informatics field, a case study method must be carefully implemented. The guidelines on case research design presented in the literature (Creswell, 2007; Hame et al., 1993; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984; 1989; 1994) are helpful.

The research design is consisted of several major phases. Firstly, the questionnaire development is presented in order to explain the structure and the goal of it. Additionally, the selected case company is presented as well as the interviewees of the research process. Afterwards, the data collection methods are carried out in order to present and explain which methods are selected and why. Finally, the data is analysed based on several techniques. To ensure the validity and reliability of this research, several measures are applied along the research process.

3.4.1 Case company and interviewees selection

The case company, which was investigated in this research, is the DPAM (Du Pareil of Meme) company, as it satisfies all the criteria set for the case company selection in this study.

✓ DPAM is one of the biggest companies in retail business in Greece. It is a large enterprise in France, which has started its business in Greece in 2007 and deals with fashion wear for kids. It is included in a large group of companies named FOURLIS, which deals with athletic equipment as well as household equipment, including the famous IKEA, as the brand company of the firm. It is expanded to other countries as well, such as Cyprus, France, Ireland, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland and many other countries in the world.
✓ The company has many experienced and helpful people, who are well-educated and qualified in their respective department.
✓ The company has a long history and experience in retail industry.
✓ I have been working in this company for more than two years and have a better access to all of the departments and people.
✓ The company and its people shared their knowledge and experiences.

Highly knowledgeable and experienced managers are selected from the case company for this study to collect the most appropriate and high quality data. The work experience of the ten managers ranges between five to twenty years and are engaged with Area Sales Department, Social Media Department, Marketing and Communication Department, Sales Management Department, Commercial Management and some Managers were also from stores. Besides, these ten managers, additional three junior level employees were interviewed who were involved in social media of the case company. In general, their educational background is in Marketing, Communication and Business Management studies, thus they can provide a lot of relevant information about my research topic.

Due to the aforementioned reasons, I have obtained adequate amount of appropriate and high quality data from this case company and interviewees answered each of my research questions sufficiently.

3.4.2 Data collection methods

The data collection involves several procedures as the researcher builds a deep picture of the under-researched topic. Yin (2009) refers to multiple forms of data collection such as documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. But Creswell (2007) minimizes them to interview, observation, documents and audio-visual material, which are the most popular. This study particularly uses interview procedures and observation.

3.4.2.1 Interview questionnaire guide development

The interview questionnaire guide is developed based on the main research questions, objectives, literature review and the theories utilized in this research. The interview questionnaire guide (see Appendix A) is composed of open-ended and semi-structured questions. The thesis supervisor reviewed the interview questionnaire guide and the questions were given to the interviewees beforehand in order to get prepared for their answers. The same questions were presented to each interviewee to get all of the relevant information from more than one source.

3.4.2.2 Interview process

The interviews process has been used and analyzed below.

I use the interview method in order to collect empirical data for this study. The interviews are semi-structured with open-ended questions. The questions are common to all interviewees; however the point of the semi-structured interview is to be able to set some broader parameters to the discussion (Crang and Cook, 2007). Additionally, researcher’s impressions and reactions are useful to be mentioned, aiming to provide a holistic overview of the situation investigated. I conducted several interviews with thirteen employees of Greek retail company’s departments such as Area Sales Department, Social Media Department, Marketing and Communication Department, Online Sales Management Department, and Commercial Department. The interview
method was selected because I wanted to collect empirical material from experienced people in the retail industry and multiple or similar opinions regarding the usage of Social Media in the company.

Specifically, I carried out face-to-face semi-structured interviews with ten Managers, working in the case company, in order to explore my research questions from different viewpoints. Specifically, each Manager is responsible for a department. They are highly-qualified and experienced people, who work in the retail section for years and have a holistic understanding of the topic from the past and the current time. Each interview was lasted for approximately one hour and thirty minutes, depending on the conversation with the interviewee and was conducted in the company’s offices in Athens. In the first stage, the interviews were conducted from 5th to 20th of June 2017, where ten managers were interviewed. In total, the time for all these interviews was more than twelve hours. The data were collected by utilizing the interview questionnaire guide. In Table 9, the codification and the exact date of each interviewee as well as the duration of each interview are described.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
<th>Interview Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>05-06-2017</td>
<td>1h 06min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>07-06-2017</td>
<td>1h 21min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>09-06-2017</td>
<td>0h 56min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>10-06-2017</td>
<td>1h 08min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>10-06-2017</td>
<td>1h 04min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>11-06-2017</td>
<td>0h 53min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M7</td>
<td>13-06-2017</td>
<td>1h 15min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M8</td>
<td>15-06-2017</td>
<td>1h 02min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M9</td>
<td>17-06-2017</td>
<td>1h10min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M10</td>
<td>20-06-2017</td>
<td>1h 08min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Interview Features

In the second stage, during the period from November 2017 to January 2018, I also conducted eight mini-interviews in order to get some more data on the use of the concepts (like Web 2.0, Shopper Marketing, Virtual Brand Communities, Consumer Generated Advertising and Viral Advertising) and parameters (like “content”, “collaboration” and “commerce” parameters) in the case company and explored the critical topics of the thesis once again with the aim if some new findings are obtained. The five of them were former interviewees and three of them were new. Regarding the new interviewees, the three of them are employees of the Social Media Manager. Each interview was conducted in the central building of case company, lasted for above twenty minutes and it was like a friendly research discussion. All the interviewees explained in detail about the use of the concepts and parameters in the case company. They also concluded that the use of Social Media is both a resource development and risk of competitiveness. Furthermore, the answers were very much similar to the
interviews that were conducted at the first stage, as well as the total results of the main research question.

3.4.2.3 Observation procedure

Besides, interview method, I used observation method for data collection.

Observation deals with generating empirical material in naturally occurring settings. It is a method which consists of a key tool for collecting data in a qualitative research. The observation method is based on research questions and purpose statement. The observer gets involved in the procedure more or less. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989, p. 79), “observation is the systematic description of events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study”. In fact, observation enables the researcher to describe several situations by using the five senses and providing a “written photograph” of the situation under study (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Observation method consists of two different types: the direct and the participant observation. In direct observation, the observer watches the current subject in his/her environment without altering it and collects empirical data. The term “non-intrusive” is often used to characterize this type also. The users do what they normally do in daily lives without being disturbed by the observer. One important advantage of this type is that users can be observed in their physical environment, where the subject under study is normally taking place. Thus, direct observation is known for its external validity (Volkmar, 2013). On the other hand, participant observation enables researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in their natural setting through observing and participating in these activities (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). For Crang and Cook (2007), the participant observation can be described as step by step process. First, the researcher gains access to the particular community, then in the second phase he lives among the people under study in order to understand their world, and third he came back to his notes writing up all the thoughts and the observations regarding that specific community’s culture. In addition, an informal interviewing can be a part of a participant observation. The direct and participant observation have both advantages/strengths and disadvantages/weaknesses. Specifically, Table 8 illustrates the main advantages and disadvantages of each type of observation (Volkmar, 2013; DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002; Crang and Cook, 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features of Observation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Observation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access to people in real life context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access to situations and people where questionnaires or interviews are unable to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• External validity (users are observed in their physical environment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction of people can be observed without being disturbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access to people in real life context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deep understanding of a situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improves the quality of data collection and interpretation and facilitates the development of new research questions or hypotheses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of informal interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Advantages/Strengths and Disadvantages/Weaknesses of Direct and Participant Observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantages/Weaknesses</th>
<th>Advantages/Strengths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of communication aspect</td>
<td>• Useful in exploring topics that are inconvenient to users to discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk of subjectivity</td>
<td>• Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Depending on the topic, risk of no sufficient data</td>
<td>• Required informed consent of participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation facilitates an in-depth and rich understanding of a phenomenon, situation and/or setting and the behavior of the participants in that setting. Direct observation is used when the goal is to explore and understand an ongoing behavior process, event, or situation. I use direct observation method in order to check out the likes and explore the contents of the comments (positive, negative and fake comments) on publications on Facebook and Instagram page of the case company. Of course, note taking is an important part in this method too. The aim of this observation is to check out the reactions and behaviors of consumers of the company and how familiar they are with the Facebook and Instagram page. Besides, I would like to detect the frequency of their likes, explore the contents of the comments on the page and how this becomes a valuable information for the company. The observation method is an appropriate data collection method for this study because I was able to watch the customer’s positive or negative feedbacks for the company and check out their actions in likes and comments on Facebook and Instagram page. This study takes some direct screenshots of customers’ positive and negative comments and how those were dealt with or replied by my case company. Some of these screenshots are shown in Appendix D.

Although I have chosen to use direct observation method in order to investigate my research problem and questions, there are other qualitative research methods for data collection, such as audio-video material, focus group, documentation and interviews. The audio-video material method is not appropriate because there is no such material to record in order to express customer’s behaviour on Facebook page about the company. Focus group is a method which is not suitable for this study because it would be hard to gather a group of people and discuss about the research topic. Also, documentation is not suitable because Social Media is an Internet-based phenomenon, thus it is not written in documents usually and there are not such documents in the case company.

Furthermore, I encountered several problems while I was observing the Social Media of case company. First of all, the specific process was time consuming. Due to the two weeks of observation, each day I spent five to six hours in order to watch the publications of case company and specifically the likes and comments of customers.
Regarding the settings of the observation method, I started with two weeks observation (17th to 30th of July) of Social Media posts of the case company on its Facebook and Instagram page, in order to observe each day and each post, how many likes and comments are made and how favorite and popular a post did. Every day I spent five to six hours in order to watch all the posts of the case company. The context of observation was competitions, lottery with gifts, photos of employees or comments of customers. I believe that an adequate amount of data has been collected because all the posts, photos and videos have been examined thoroughly and observed, all the likes and comments have been read carefully and I took notes all the time in order to check out the time of each day that either likes or comments were more. Also, the two-week observation during the summer session with sales in all stores of the case company, gives a representative sample of customer’s behavior.

3.4.3 Data Analysis

In order to make data analysis both rigorous and effective, this study systematically deployed several strategies suggested by many researchers (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2008; Lacity and Janson, 1994; Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Miles, 1983; Miles and Huberman, 1984, 1994; Nahar, 2001). Thematic analysis has been used in this case study. Analytically, this data analysis method helps the researcher to understand participants’ experiences when a phenomenon is investigated and aims to interpretation of several perspectives which are based on real quotations from the participants (Silverman, 2011). In thematic analysis, the researcher identifies and reports themes which are occurring by interpreting the context within data collection. Rubin and Rubin (1995, cited in Braun and Clark, 2006) claim that thematic analysis helps in discovering emerging themes entrenched into interviews throughout the research process. Specifically, according to Braun and Clark (2006) “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set”.

Thematic analysis contains advantages that are important during the research process like flexibility and accessibility regarding the conduct and the results for qualitative researchers and the public. Also, it reinforces the interpretation of data within a participatory pattern where participants act as collaborators and contribute in policy development (Braun and Clark, 2006).

Informal data analysis (Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Miles, 1983; Nahar, 2001; Taylor and Bogdan, 1984) was performed during and immediately after each interview:
1. During each interview, ideas and references to the past literature and theories were recorded in written form as they occurred.
2. Summarizing of interviews was made immediately after each interview and preliminary findings were identified.

The interview summary and identification of each preliminary finding were useful for data reduction and conducting preliminary analysis.

A more formal process was performed by transcribing the taped interviews (Miles, 1983; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Nahar, 2001). Each taped interview was carefully
listened to and transcribed verbatim following a second listening. A third listening in which the transcribed text was compared to the tape was also performed. Texts were carefully edited and sent to interviewees for authenticity. Following their comments and feedback, corrections or adjustments, if any, were made and noted.

A total number of thirteen people were interviewed and asked the same basic questions as well as questions from the interview questionnaire guide. The information collected was verified by comparing with the data from several other sources (e.g. company’s internal magazines, annual reports and other internal documents) and comparing data of several interviews.

This study has used thematic analysis (both top down and bottom up approaches) (Braun and Clark, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1984, 1994) for analyzing the qualitative data as described below.

With a top down thematic analysis, I worked from the top down. I have divided the main research question into sub-questions. One or multiple sub-themes were created from each sub-question. The following sub-themes have been used in this study:

- Social Media and Social Networks according to retail companies
- Social Media and Social Networks use in the retail businesses
- The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the usage of Social Media and Social Networks in retail businesses
- Differences in currently using Social Media and Social Networks and when there was economic crisis seven years ago
- Economic benefits in retail businesses from the use of Social Media and Social Networks
- Use of Social Media and Social networks in future in retail businesses
- Use of the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks in retail businesses
- Social Media and Social networks use in retail businesses: a resource development or risk of increased competition
- Using Social Media and Social networks for Information and Knowledge Management in retail companies

The abovementioned sub-themes were further divided into various categories and sub-categories. I have extensively used an iterative approach to refine these various categories and sub-categories themes, which have been presented in Tables in Chapter 4.

I have used Tables to sort out the data according to the suggestion of Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest the following analytic techniques:

- “putting information into different arrays
- making a matrix of categories and placing the evidence within such categories”

Numerous times, I have gone through the data before sorting out and also after placing them in Tables in Chapter 4 and I have refined them further.
With a bottom up thematic analysis approach, I worked from the bottom up according to Braun and Clark (2006), which has been described below:

- **Data familiarization**: I read the data and transcribed the data when it was needed.
- **Initial coding generation**: Throughout the research coding of the data further helped the entire process.
- **Themes search**: I congregated data and interconnected the gathered codes with patterned themes.
- **Themes review**: Patterned themes were reviewed.
- **Themes definition**: Definition of names for each theme was promoted based on an ongoing analysis of the entire data setting.
- **Report production**: I reported all the results of the patterned themes that came out of the extracted data.

To support the analysis, several quotations from the interviewees have been included in Chapter 4: Empirical Data Analysis and Findings.

### 3.5 Validity and Reliability

The purpose of this study is to explore if the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses consist of a resource development or a risk of competitiveness or both of them or none of them. All the results and findings of the research have been evaluated for their validity and reliability during the whole process. Specifically, qualitative validity is about checking by researcher for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures. Qualitative reliability indicates that the approach of researcher is consistent across different researchers (Gibbs, 2007).

First of all, the most important is that interviews represent a clear picture of the situation examined in this research, while interviews are never truly objective in their findings. Thus, the collected data from interviews give a more complete and detailed representation of the topic of this research. This was achieved by adapting Creswell’s (2009) methods to the current research approach in order to ensure the validity of these findings:

Specifically, the interviewees were presented with a standard interview questionnaire guide, which examined their experience with Social Media of the case company and whether Social Media and Social Networks consist of a resource development or a risk of increased competition or both of them or none of them, in order to ensure that the context information was complete and sufficient. Then, the collected data was cross-referenced with several overall reactions regarding Social Media of the case company, in order to ensure the objectivity of the interview questionnaire guide. Finally, the collated data was presented back to the interviewees in order to ensure that their answers were represented well and each topic has been correctly examined. Every piece of data was checked for accuracy, as well as transcripts and codes were checked if they had possible meaning shifting, analysis was shared and data was cross-checked by comparing results (Creswell, 2009).

Also, according to the suggestions of researchers (Ilmo, 2006; Morgan and Krueger, 1993; Nahar, 2001; Nahar et al., 2006; Stake, 1995; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin,
Firstly, the interview questionnaire guide was developed and then it was checked by my supervisor. The interviewees of the case company also checked the interview questionnaire guide. The SWOT framework, theories and the interview questionnaire guide were used in order to have more detailed documentation of the data and minimize errors and biases (Ilmo, 2006; Nahar, 2001).

Secondly, the selected interviewees had to be involved in Social Media and Social Networks of the case company.

Thirdly, all the concepts of the specific research were described analytically to the interviewees before conducting the interviews, in order to have a clear view of the upcoming topic of the interview. This is helpful in order to improve construct validity (Ilmo, 2006; Nahar et al., 2006).

Fourthly, the answers of the interview questionnaire guide were sent back to the interviewees in order to check errors and to evaluate the validity of interpretation (Morgan and Krueger, 1993; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Furthermore, all interviewees answered in the same questions, hence the results are carefully compared.

Fifthly, multiple data sources (Jick, 1979; Lacity and Janson, 1994; Yin, 1984; 1994) and multiple data analysis techniques have been used in this study in order to increase the reliability and validity of the research.

Furthermore, the trustworthiness of this study had to be ensured, so the strategic framework of Lincoln and Guba (1985) was adopted. The reason for using this framework is that they suggested several criteria in order to ensure the trustworthiness of a study and more specifically the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of it.

Regarding the credibility of the study, this term is related with the accuracy of recording the phenomenon which is under investigation. Shenton (2004) claims that the ensuring of credibility of a study consists of several axes. At first, it is very important to make familiarity with the participants or create a very friendly environment before conducting interviews. Thus, in this study, before each interview with a participant, a friendly environment was established with a short introductory discussion about their daily tasks and responsibilities, their job demands and their educational background. Additionally, Shenton (2004) reported tactics in order to ensure honesty between informants when contributing to the research process. These tactics were adopted in this study, while informing the interviewees that their presence is voluntary and they could cancel their participation at any time, ensuring confidentiality and the anonymity of them as well as that they would not answer to any question if they feel uncomfortable. Of course, each participant has the right to check the whole interview process and answers in order to check the extracted data, ensuring for credibility of the study.

Regarding the transferability and dependability of the study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed that, each part of the research need to be described extensively, such as the research problem and questions, information about the participants and research methods, as well as the data analysis process. In this study, all this information was
extensively analyzed and could be a very good resource for future researchers in order to apply these methods in exploring another topic of this theme.

3.6 Ethical Considerations or Research Ethics

As mentioned above, all the extracted results have been evaluated for their accuracy, validity and reliability during the whole research process. Simultaneously, Hart (2005) reported the importance of data accuracy, while avoiding the personal assumptions of the researcher regarding the collected data. Furthermore, an informed consent was shared to the interviewees of the study. The informed consent is based on the understanding that each participation is voluntary and all the participants have the right to cancel their participation whenever they prefer to (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In specific, each informed consent should include the purpose of the study and what kind of participation is required from the participants. The informed consent of this study both in English and Greek languages is illustrated in Appendix B.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) also mentioned the meaning of the anonymity and the confidentiality. As they refer, anonymity means that the identification of each participant will not be disclosed to other people outside of this research team, while confidentiality means that each researcher must avoid any comments in presentations or reports that probably could identify the participants. The meaning of anonymity and confidentiality should also be related to the process of collecting and storing data. In addition, all the findings and outcomes of this study will be available for everyone in order to use them for future researches about similar topics. All interviewees participated voluntarily in the research process, while the researcher ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the personal information.

Furthermore, the process of transcribing participants’ words and ideas was a difficult and time-consuming task. The whole interview process was conducted on the Greek language, thus a very special attention was given while translating the interview text from Greek language to English language. It is important to mention though, that some of the interviewees accepted to give interviews in English language. Also, the posts of case company’s Social Networks are in Greek language.

3.7 Limitations of Applied Methodology and the Strategies Utilized to Overcome the Limitations

Firstly, the paraphrasing of interviewee’s words was a long and tough process, in order not to lose its meanings and give a wrong result in empirical findings. In order to overcome this weakness, I decided to study all the answers of each question regularly and then write a summary of them.

But several limitations have been encountered in selection and application of research methods too. First of all, a few interviewees did not have enough time to participate in the face-to-face interviews. Therefore, some interviews were also conducted through Skype and email. Skype was a better means than email, in order to observe the reactions and behaviour of each interviewee while answering or discussing questions. On the other hand, email was a good tool because all the answers were clearly stated and the interviewees could write the answers at their free time. Due to significantly lack of time
of some potential interviewees, the number of interviewees could not be increased to more than ten.

While I was observing the Social Media of the case company, I also faced some problems. In some cases, the likes and comments were less, so I waited for longer in order to watch the precise hour of many likes and comments on each day. Additionally, one important problem was the weekends, as on these days, customers liked and commented a lot on several publications of the case company, especially on competitions or lottery with gifts.

No single research method is perfect for executing a research project chosen. A case study method has been identified as being the most appropriate method for investigating this research problem, yet it may have a few weaknesses.

This research uses a single-case design. Single-case research imposes limitations and is subject to possible bias. Miles and Huberman (1994) have shown that in a multiple case research there is much potential for both greater explanatory power and greater generalization than what a single-case study can deliver. That was controlled for by doing what Yin (1994) suggests. According to Yin (1994), special attention must be given to the selection of an appropriate case company. He maintains that the type of case company been selected must have already successfully executed the same process that is under investigation. DPAM, the case company selected for this study, fits this profile and has used social media for a variety of purposes.

A case study method is often blamed for producing massive quantities of time-consuming data that are difficult to summarize and analyze. The research framework (SWOT), theories, and an interview questionnaire guide are used to maintain the focus on data collection and to reduce the amount of material to be processed. Preliminary analysis of the data as soon as it was collected also reduced the need for a huge amount of information. Another criticism is that the researchers allow equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the findings and the conclusion. In order to control for this, and following the suggestions of Miles and Huberman (1994) and Nahar (2001), the data interpretation was checked by my thesis supervisor and the interviewees of the case company. The research results were approved by the interviewees of the case company.

Additionally, research methodologists (Cavaye, 1996; Lee, 1989; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) have commented that a case study method can be criticized for being too subjective with the researcher acting as the primary subjective data selection instrument. This suggests the possibility of unethical selection of data and bias. There is also limited standardization of data analysis, and data could be misinterpreted. In order to avoid subjective bias, several measures have been integrated into the research design (Jick, 1983; Kaplan and Duchon, 1988; Lee, 1991; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Nahar, 2001; Ragin, 1987; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).
4 Empirical Data Analysis and Findings

In this chapter, a case analysis has been performed for the investigated company. In this study, case study method has been used to conduct the research and thematic analysis (see section 3.4.4 Data Analysis) approach has been used to analyze the interviews data. To support the analysis, a number of quotations from the interviewees has been included in this case analysis section.

4.1 Description case company

DPAM (Du Pareil Au Meme) is the case company of this research. It is a large company in fashion wear for kids from 0 to 14 years old. It was established in Paris in 1978, when a theatrical costume designer decided to open a store with clothes for children. Then, the owner of the company thought to design alone some special clothes, which were unique and beautiful in this period. Over the years, this company has grown rapidly in France and other countries. Specifically, the case company started its operation in Greece in 2007. During these ten years, many changes have been made in order to adjust the philosophy of the company to Greece’s situation. All these years, the company has been transformed into a dynamic and competitive business in its sector in the Greek retail market. Many employees work in this company, including me, in several departments and stores. In specific, 305 individuals work in the enterprise and 25 managers are responsible for several departments. The company is included in a large group of companies named FOURLIS. The address of the company is Sorou 18-20, Marousi in Athens. The website of the company is www.dpam.gr.com.

Among the stores of the case company, 18 stores are operated in Greece and more than 600 stores are in operation all over the world. It deals with clothes, shoes and accessories for kids as well as offers some important profits every year for charity aims. The Social Media and Social Networks of the company are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Yammer and its website. Analytically, the answers of the interviewees regarding the interview questionnaire guide of the company’s Social Media and Social Networks, are discussed in detail.

4.2 Social Media and Social networks according to interviewees

In section 2.2, the two concepts of Social Media and Social Networks are explained analytically regarding their definitions and differences. But it was interesting to research the interviewees’ thoughts about these concepts. Through the interviews, I found that these two concepts are confusable even to managers of Social Media. In this study, M stands for manager.

Specifically, M1 answered that: “Hmm let me think about it…Well, Social Media is the content which someone uploads, whether that’s a blog or a video or a podcast; Social Media is a kind of one to many communication methods. On the other hand, Social Networks are about creating relationships or communicating with your readers or followers and connecting with your audience”. He familiarized the Social Media concept with one person’s communication, while Social Networks are meant communication with other people.
On the other hand, M2 answered: “Firstly, Social Media are kind of forms of electronic communication through which users can create online communities in order to share information, ideas, personal messages or other contents like videos or podcasts. On the other hand, Social Networking is the creation and maintenance of personal and business relationships. I think the goals of these two media are different. With Social Networking, the goal is to build a network of followers and foster these relationships. On the other hand, Social Media try to generate interaction and data acquisition for lead generation and more sales”. Specifically, this manager defined these two concepts in a similar way but he focused on the difference of their goals. Social Networking sites are more appropriate for building both personal and business relationships, while Social Media are more suitable for data acquisition.

Furthermore, M3 stated that: “Social Media is the use of web-based or mobile technologies in order to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. On the other hand, Social Networks is a social structure where people with a common interest join a group. In specific, Social Media is a kind of broad term and consists of different types of media like videos, blogs, podcasts, etc. It is a place through which you can transmit information to other individuals, a means of communication. The main purpose of Social Networking is creating connection with other people. It is about mutual communication”. This view is in line with M1. M3 also stated that Social Media is a kind of one to many communications, while Social Networks is a kind of mutual communication.

Moreover, M4 and M8 stated that Social Media is the use of web-based or mobile technologies that help in creating an interactive dialogue, while Social Networking is a social structure where people with a common interest join a group. So, in contrast with previous answers, these participants defined very briefly and simply these two concepts.

On the other hand, M5 answered the question very analytically: “Well, Social Media are online forms of communication whereby people can share ideas and create communities. Social Networks are online platforms facilitating interaction and the building of online relationships. In Social Networks users may be both active by participating in discussions and managing their profile or passive listeners of what others say. In contrast, Social Media users are always actively publishing content and trying to generate discussions and create relationships with followers. This leads to another difference, where the goal of Social Media is to create interaction while the primary goal of Social Networks is to create large followers. That is why, in Social Networks users’ content centers around creating a discussion while in Social Media the content is designed to foster engagement. Finally, it is harder to measure ROI on Social Media because it is hard to quantify and measure return based on engagement and buzz. It is much simpler on Social Networks where success can be seen from the number of followers”. This participant answered the question in detail by determining the differences of these two concepts and their characteristics.

Another definition provided by M6 and M7 who stated that these two concepts are very familiar in daily lives of people. Social Media are the means and tools regarding the electronic communication process between people, while Social Networks are considered as the process which is done for the internet connected people. In fact, they both recognize the electronic communication between people but the differences is that Social Media are the tools and Social Networks are the process of this communication. On the other hand, M9 and M10 gave me the same answers but in an opposite way.
They insisted that Social Media are the process of communication between people, while Social Networks are the tools for this communication.

Based on the above interview data, I understood that Social Media and Social Networks are confusing concepts. They both have similar meanings for most of the people but in fact they have main differences. Some of the interviewees of course, realized these differences and some others replied simply and briefly. The most important result of this question is that these two terms have main differences in their theoretical and practical application and are not the same, as many people think.

4.3 Social Media and Social Networks used in case company

The case company uses several Social Media and Networks to perform daily activities. The next question asked to interviewees was regarding the usage of Social Media and Social Networks in the case company. The question has several sub-questions such as the business functions and the ways that are used. Also, the participants were asked to answer about their preferred Social Media and Social Networks regarding their use in case company. In Table 10, all the answers of the ten participants are illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants/Questions</th>
<th>Social Media &amp; Networks used in company</th>
<th>Business functions</th>
<th>Ways of use</th>
<th>Preferred Social Media &amp; Social Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube</td>
<td>Advertisement, Trade goods and services, Human resources, Reviews for products</td>
<td>Uploading sales, searching employees, gathering reviews for products, promoting products and services</td>
<td>Facebook and Instagram (popular and ease of use), LinkedIn (easily hiring people and see their capabilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Yammer</td>
<td>Uploading news and competitions, marketing functions, hiring staff</td>
<td>Uploading five to six posts every week for promotion of products</td>
<td>Facebook and Instagram (popular and ease of use), Yammer (cooperating with employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yammer</td>
<td>Marketing and communication functions, organizing business team</td>
<td>Uploading six posts every week to Facebook and Instagram and one post every week to Twitter, organizing schedules and deadlines by Yammer</td>
<td>Facebook (popular, economic), Yammer (organized and strict to deadlines)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 10: Answers of participants regarding the Social Media and Social Networks used in the case company**

Among the Social Media and Social Networks that the company uses, in fact Facebook and Instagram are the most widely used and popular media. All the participants
mentioned these two names first and then they mentioned other names. Furthermore, all the participants claimed that these two Social Media sites are the most successful in communication with customers and many people have been attracted through them. Twitter is also famous for eight to ten participants, although it is used in a limited way in the company. LinkedIn and Yammer are the rest of the sites which were mentioned by the participants. However, not all participants referred to these two sites, but the majority of them did.

Moreover, the similar business functions were mentioned by most of the participants. The communication and marketing reasons were the most highly answered, while the hiring staff issue kept an important place in their answers. The organization of business groups was also another business function in connection with Yammer. The uploading of posts about sales, products and services, events or contents were answered by the majority of participants. M1 insisted on the reviews of products which is an important part of a company. When there are good reviews on products then those products are sold quickly and completely and if there are some bad reviews/comments then those products are not sold enough.

Furthermore, the way Social Media and Networks used is described comprehensively and clearly. Most of the participants claimed that almost five to six posts are uploaded to Facebook and Instagram every week, while one post to Twitter weekly. Through Yammer, all the managers communicate with rest of the employees in order to organize their schedules and deadlines for projects and tasks. LinkedIn is used frequently for hiring purposes by posting hiring advertisements.

Regarding the preferred Social Media and Social Networks of participants, it is obvious that Facebook and Instagram have become the top preference of almost all the participants. The reasons for that are either the popularity or ease of use or the better promotion of products through these two media. LinkedIn is also preferred by some participants in order to simplify the hiring process, while Yammer helps in making better organizing schedules, etc. between the employees.

The case company uses several terms/concepts in their daily activities, such as Web 2.0, Shopper Marketing, Virtual Brand Communities, Consumer Generated Advertising and Viral advertising. More about these concepts has been discussed in Discussion Chapter.

The case company is benefiting by using the several “content”, “collaboration” and “commerce” parameters. Interviewees mentioned that the case company uses:

a) podcasts, RSS feeds and mashups from content parameters
b) blogs, user reviews, customer peep-to-peer network and collaborative product customizations
c) the contextual shopping from the “commerce parameters”

It is increasing the usage of “content”, “collaboration” and “commerce” parameters. More about these issues has been discussed in Discussion Chapter.
## 4.4 The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the usage of Social Media and Social Networks in the case company

Table 11 illustrates the answers of all ten participants of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the usage of Social Media and Social Networks in the case company.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Fast-hiring, increasing of marketing and reputation of company</td>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
<td>Broader events and announcements, economic benefits</td>
<td>Lack of control, negative comments, increasing competition, fake comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Attraction of customers and communication with customers, increases of sales and popularity</td>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
<td>Acquisition of new customers, generating economic benefits</td>
<td>Increasing competition, negative comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Better management of employees, promotion of products, brand names and sales</td>
<td>Time-consuming, more skills of specific employees required</td>
<td>Broader events and announcements, fast communication of a product</td>
<td>Increasing competition, lack of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>Attraction of customers and communication with customers, quick and complete selling of many products</td>
<td>Time-consuming, lack of knowledge of employees, complain concerns</td>
<td>Acquisition of new customers, generating economic benefits</td>
<td>Negative comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>Communication with customers</td>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
<td>Economic benefits, fast communication of a product</td>
<td>Lack of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>Free access to videos, ads, contests</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge of employees</td>
<td>Broader events and announcements, acquisition of new customers</td>
<td>Lack of control, negative comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M7</td>
<td>Attraction of customers and communication with customers</td>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
<td>Fast communication of a product</td>
<td>Increasing competition, lack of control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The strengths and opportunities of Social Media and Social Networks for the company are multiple, according to interviewees. M2, M4, M7 and M8 claimed that the attraction of customers and communication with them by answering to comments or messages are the most important benefits of these sites. M1 and M10 referred to fast hiring people in company and quick selection because of the availability of professional profiles on these sites. The marketing reasons, the increasing of reputation of company and the in-depth knowing of products to a broader audience are some of the benefits of Social Media and Networks. Social Media tool Yammer is used to communicate, organize, implement and monitor various tasks by managers in a low cost and fast way. Managers develop high potential new products and also update the existing products radically by thoroughly examining the likes, positive comments and negative comments on similar products.

On the other hand, the weaknesses and threats in them were similar to most of the answers. Seven out of ten participants insisted about the time-cost of these sites. Specifically, they claimed that a manager needs to spend enough time to check reviews, post or comment to customers, so all these are enough time-consuming. Another important barrier was the risk of increasing of competition. Six out of ten participants answered that all these marketing or communication process through Social Media and Social Networks lead to the increasing risk of competition because more and more companies try to defeat each other and be the best in market for the audience. Harmful or fake comments could be another barrier as well as the need for more training skills of the employees who are responsible especially for tackling the fake and negative comments. Most of the interviewees emphasized that the fake or negative comments need answering very promptly. All the interviewees told that the contents of the positive comments mostly cover the features, benefits and performances of the products, prices of the products, customer service and delivery of the products. Negative comments also cover the aforementioned issues. Fake comments cover mostly the features, benefits and
performances of the products. Many interviewees also stated that companies have lack of control over the contents of the posts made by customers on Social Media.

Competitors often monitor and steal product information of the top selling products of the company by observing Social Media and webstore, then make similar products and sell them with lower prices.

All the interviewees mentioned that if a company can utilize these strengths and opportunities effectively, tackle the weaknesses and threats successfully, then the company can benefits immensely from the Social Media. Therefore, all companies should put high importance on Social Media.

### 4.5 Differences in currently using Social Media and Social Networks in case company and when there was economic crisis seven years ago

This section explores the differences in currently using Social Media and Social Networks in case company and seven years ago when there was a severe economic crisis. All the participants were enthusiastic about this question. It is a very important question as it describes the current use of these sites in comparison with seven years ago when economic crisis of Greece started.

M1, M2, M4, M9 and M10 focused on technological revolution of societies regarding Social Media and Networks. For example, M1 stated that: “Hmm, well, currently more people are technologically evolved with Social Media and Social Networks, so more and more people are using social media now. Also, companies and societies are generally more technologically advanced and familiar with this kind of technology than seven years ago when there was economic crisis”. M2 similarly insisted that: “Well, seven years ago, Social Media and Social Networks were not so popular and not so handy in promoting than currently. Today, the most successful marketing way is just the Social Media and Social Networks. Also, more and more people, regardless of their age, are familiar with the social media sites so, they communicate mostly or comment on any company’s products and services”. Following thoughts given by the previous managers, M4 complemented also: “Now everything revolves around the digital era. Social Media have become a necessary marketing tool. While both social media marketing and content marketing can be used for a multiple purposes, social media marketing generally tends to focus on two main objectives. First, it is used for brand awareness — generating activity and discussion around the brand. Secondly, it is used for customer retention/satisfaction — brands can use social channels as an open forum for direct dialogues with customers, often around issues or questions that consumers have”. Based on the above empirical finding, it can be stressed that the development of technology has been vast over the years, in parallel Social Media and Social Networks have also developed greatly in terms of their advanced functions and widely use. Moreover, M4 added two main objectives of currently use of Social Media and Networks that are the brand awareness and the customer satisfaction.

On the other hand, M3, M7 and M8 answered the specific question but focusing on the particular factor. Specifically, M3 stated that: “Well, seven years ago, the economic crisis had just begun in Greece and people became more insecure regarding their shopping and money. So, till then Social Networks were not so necessary than now
because our company had more budgets in order to promote our products with different ways such as TV or radio advertisements, being sponsors in important events, etc. But in current time, Social Networks have become very popular and useful. All these media can be used almost with less cost and most of the times are very profitable. In fact, with less budget, if a company uses Facebook or Instagram for instance, its products or offers or brand name itself are getting known to a large number of people. So, I think that the most important change brought in regarding using Social Media and Networks has been the economic crisis of the country and generally the economic factor”. These three participants concentrated on the economic factor of Social Media and Social Networks. In fact, they supported that before severe economic crisis, the company had more budget available for TV or radio advertisements which were cost effective and no needed for so much marketing through Social Media. But currently, when budgets have lowered due to the economic crisis of the country, Social Media and Networks are the most economical ways for promoting products or services or brand name itself. According to these three participants, the economic factor is the major reason for the development and use of Social Media and Networks in the company.

M5 and M6 focused on the customer’s perspective mainly. Specifically, M5 claimed that these days the use of Social Media and Social Networks is more widespread among people than earlier when there was economic crisis. So, the company is needed to be more active and participative in these sites in order to attract more customers and achieve more marketing aims. Thus, the company has to be able to benefit from “media integration, engage and discuss with customers”. Furthermore, M6 underpinned that more and more people use Social Media and Networks currently than seven years ago, so the company has to take advantage of the usage of these media and be more active on Social Media. As a result of this, customers or followers of the company are able to shop online through the electronic shop linked to Facebook and Instagram. So, the users have direct communication with the electronic shop of the company.

Based on the above empirical finding, the three main factors are listed here. The technologically development of the societies regarding Social Media and Social Networks, the economic factor of a country and the familiarity of customers with the use of Social Media and Networks.

4.6 Economic benefits in case company from the use of Social Media and Social Networks

This section discusses the benefits of Social Media and Social networks in case company from the economic perspective.

Specifically, M1, M7 and M8 discussed that Social Media and Social Networks consist of a more economic way to advertise or promote company’s products and services than the TV or radio advertisements. They also emphasized that for hiring process, instead of making an announcement on an appropriate site, the company is able to make posts on Facebook; for example, seeking a suitable candidate for a potential position. In fact, M1 claimed that: “Well, Social Media and Networks obviously have several economic benefits to our company. The most important benefit I can think is the savings of budget for future TV advertisements and hiring announcements. In fact, we can save money from the marketing process by promoting our products and services through Facebook, for example, and in the future we can have more money for performing more marketing
actions such as through TV or radio advertisements”. These participants claimed that Social Media and Social Networks have the ability to save money for the company and company can use this money for performing other actions either for marketing plans or communication process or any other business functions.

On the other hand, M2, M3, M6 and M9 supported another main benefit of these sites regarding the economic perspective of company. M2 stated that: “Well, economically, the usage of Social Media creates some benefits to our company. But I think that the most important benefit is that more and more customers over the time are informed about our products and services, so the economic part is always rising. The customers “run” to our stores in order to buy a favorite product or to take advantage of a special price of a product”. Similarly, M3 also supported that: “Hmm, well the economic point of view is very important both for companies and consumers. Regarding our company, the usage of Social Media and Networks has positive impact on economic section. Our products and offers are becoming famous and well-known very fast and people “run” to our stores in order to buy a specific product which is in less quantity or to take advantage of a special offer. So, this fact brings more money into our company and simultaneously our customers are very happy with us and will come back in next days”. All these participants almost underpinned the same benefit. In fact, they thought the economic benefits from the customer’s perspective are by watching a special offer or a favorite product or a helpful service from company’s Social Media page. This fast and easy advertisement on Facebook or Instagram page of company makes people visiting the stores, buying the preferred products or reclaiming the preferred services. As a result, the profits of company are higher and the development regarding the economic point of view is increasing.

M4, M5 and M10 suggested other benefits which are responsible for creating economic benefits of Social Media and Social Networks in company. Specifically, M4 claimed that: “Well, economically, several benefits obtained from the usage of Social Media in our company are the brand awareness, the increasing customer rate, new means of recruiting, increasing of branded hashtags mentions which leads to popularity of company and products”. M5 mentioned that: “Social Media are a very cost-effective means of communication and advertising especially when compared to TV spots. So, by combining extensive use of Social Media with a selective TV presence we are able to reach our target audience at a lower cost”. These three participants reported some more benefits regarding the economic point of view such as the brand awareness, the increasing customer traffic and economic ways of recruiting and in combination with the cost-effectiveness of Social Media and the TV presence, the profit of company increased.

4.7 Use of Social Media and Social networks in future in the case company

After the question and answers of current and preferred Social Media and Social Networks use in case company, the future use of other Social Media is important too. Maybe there are some Social Media which are not used currently in company, but company wishes to use them for business purposes in the future.

M1, M7 and M10 reported the future use of Twitter. Specifically, M7 claimed that: “Well, in our company, we would like to use Twitter more frequently in order to have
more followers and more internet sites where we could promote our products and services. Twitter is an expert media because of the hashtags which could be useful and representative for our company”. M1 and M10 had the same thoughts and supported the future use of Twitter due to its reputation and increasing growth. However, some other participants emphasized on the future use of Twitter and YouTube.

Specifically, M2, M3 and M5 insisted that YouTube is another means of communication which would be very helpful and reliable for customers. M3 reported that: “In future, we may think to use more frequently Twitter for marketing and communication purposes because it is becoming more popular and as we have already created hashtags, it would be a good chance for our company to be more active in there (on Twitter) too. Also, YouTube could be the best medium for publishing more advertisements and videos from our stores or events in order to show our working groups and products to customers. In fact, we would like to upload at least once a week a video representing one sales person who will introduce the collection of the week as well the products in this collection”. Moreover, M5 claimed that: “We are considering increasing our activity on YouTube as it is a platform that enables relationship building and provides a more real and original touch to our message compared to other Social Media. Thus, we hope that we will be able to engage more with our consumers and on a more personal level, get to know them better and ultimately strengthen their satisfaction and loyalty to our brand. YouTube is also a platform that none of our direct competitors is currently using regularly, so by increasing our current usage of it we will gain a competitive advantage”. So, YouTube is another future Social Media which would be the representative for the company by presenting videos of its products and physical stores, advertisements for the company or employees who talk on the camera and present the collections.

Furthermore, M4 and M6 underpinned other two Social Media sites such as Amazon and Google+. M4 answered: “Well, I think that Amazon would be useful for reviews and ratings of products as well as Google+ for more advertisements. These sites are becoming more familiar with the Greek consumers since last few years”. M6 also stated that: “In my opinion, in future we could use Google+ as it is becoming popular to Greek customers and Amazon in order to have ratings or reviews for our products”. Thus, Amazon and Google+ are Social Media sites which could be very useful in future for advertising reasons and reviewing the products of company.

Lastly, M8 and M9 supported the Instagram and Twitter sites in order to be used frequently in future as company’s Social Media and Networks. They insisted that regarding Instagram, more posts could be updated every day or every week by promoting offers or sales or contests or products. On the other hand, the view of future use of Twitter is similar with the view of M1, M7 and M10 who believe that due to hashtags and more users on this media, the company could be followed by more customers.

So, Twitter and YouTube are the most preferred Social Media for future use for company either for marketing or for performing any other business functions. Most of the participants thought that these sites could be helpful and profitable for company.
4.8 Use of integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks in case company

The usage of integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks in company is important, as it can offer significant benefits to companies. The participants were asked about the failure of using integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Networks in order to perform a variety of business functions in company and how this fact could be faced upon.

4.8.1 Reasons for failure in using integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks in case company

The participants gave several answers to the failure of using integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks, but one topic was emphasized by all the participants: the economic crisis of the country which affects the business itself. Specifically, the participants referred to the lack of knowledgeable employees to check out all these sites. The current lower budgets of the company due to economic crisis of the country made the company to have only the specific and necessary employees in every section, thus there are a few employees for checking all these media. For example, M1 stated that: “We would like to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media but the lack of skilled personnel to monitor all the social media is obvious. Especially, in this period, with so many financial problems in our country, we have just the most necessary employees that are needed for each function. Also, the lack of the unified capabilities of multiple social media is another important reason for not using them”.

Also, M2 reported that: “Hmm, I think that currently this is a hard task for all the companies in our country. Firstly, there is a significant lack of knowledge in all these tools. People must be fully equipped with knowledge about them. Also, there is a lack of qualified employees. As each company uses more media, more people will need for checking them out”. Moreover, M3 supported that: “Hmm, I think that the main reason for not using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media is the fewer employees of the company. Due to economic crisis of the country, our company has also reduced the personnel so we would need more people to organize, manage and monitor all this Social Media and Social Networks”. I realized that another important reason for failure in using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social networks was the lack of knowledge in all these media. Seven out of ten participants insisted this fact and it is obvious that the personnel need more experience and education in multiple Social Media and Networks.

Based on the participants’ answers above, the lack of skilled/knowledgeable employees in the company is the main reason for the failure in using integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks in company.

However, despite having the similar view of almost all the interviewees, one participant answered a bit differently. Specifically, M5 stated that: “We are currently using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube on different levels of intensity. We have a very dynamic presence on Facebook and Instagram while a more limited but still active presence on Twitter. YouTube is the only platform we currently use on which we have a very sporadic presence. This is due to the cost of creating, editing and publishing a
video both in time and money”. The specific manager answered to a more optimistic way by referring to the Social Media and Social Networks that are currently used by the company and emphasized on the future use of YouTube. Of course, the interviewee justified the reasons for not using widely YouTube but seemed very hopeful for its future use.

4.8.2 Actions for improvement in using integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks in case company

Participants were requested to discuss the actions necessary for improvement in using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks in case company. Most of the participants expressed that hiring more personnel with required knowledge and skills in the company is necessary in order to be able to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks. It is evident that the more knowledge and education of employees in Social Media section is required for company.

Specifically, M1 stated that: “Well, in continuation with the previous question, we need to hire more people who will be responsible for multiple Social Media and enrich our knowledge in the integrated capabilities of multiple social media”. Moreover, M2 answered that: “Maybe, if we hire more people in future, we could use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media. I think that it will be very important if we could do it, because Social Media is the most successful and economic way for marketing, so the more Social Media we use, the more fast results we will have”. Furthermore, M4 stated that: “Well, this is a very important question. We would like to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in our company but it needs many things. Firstly, we need more people to hire in order to check and update each Social Media and Network. After all, we will need more time along with the new hiring people in order to check the frequency of likes and comments and to answer the questions. The new hiring people need to be highly qualified and knowledgeable about these media in order to be able to handle them correctly and effectively”. The view of M1, M2 and M4 is supported by the rest of the participants concerning the failure in using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and Social Networks in case company, discussed in previous section.

M5’s view was different concerning the reasons for failure, he replied in the following way: “We are currently actively using three different platforms (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) so we are integrating multiple Social Media to some extent. However, there is always room for improvement and one area for us could be to reinforce our presence on YouTube. We can also focus on message content more extensively to adjust our message for each platform to take maximum advantage of its capabilities”. So, the manager insisted on the current improvements that have been made, while mentioned that “there is always room for improvement” by referring to the message content of each platform.

4.9 Facebook and Instagram of the case company: A resource development or risk of increased competition?

Participants were requested to answer whether the social media were a resource development or risk of increased competition, or both or none of them.
Firstly, M1 stated that: “Hmm, that’s a question that needs extended thoughts. Well, I think that Facebook and Instagram are both resource development and risk of competitiveness because through Facebook and Instagram you can advertise your products and offers to a wider public with less expenses, but at the same time companies like yours also see the offers and try to make more competitive offers or try to lower the quality of your products through fake comments and reviews. As the customers are increasing at the same time the competition is increasing too”. M2 also replied that: “Well, this question is very crucial. I think that they are both of them. As I said before, Social Media can bring in huge amounts of good results in the company. Especially, during the periods like sales-offers, people look for companies with the best prices in order to make their shopping. So, Social Media are definitely considered as a resource development. On the other hand, more and more companies take advantage of this development and are looking for being competitive. For example, if we do a very attractive offer for a week and communicate it through all Social Media and Networks of the company, then the competitive companies will think of a better offer for the same days or longer. So, both of them are the most suitable answer in my opinion”. These two participants along with M6, M7, M8 and M10 expressed that Facebook and Instagram are both resource development and risk of competitiveness. Based on the views expressed by these managers (and other managers in previous answers), regarding resource development, it is understood that these two sites are the most useful and effective means of promotion and communication for the company. So, more and more customers become drawn or attracted to the company every day and search about its products, offers, prices, services or sales. With the ongoing communication with customers through these sites, the company is being developed and attracting more customers. However, other similar businesses also watch the case company and try to be competitive in order to distract the customers to other companies and as a result, the competition is increasing.

Although the majority of interviewees explained that Facebook and Instagram are both resource development and risk of competitiveness for company, M3 claimed that: “This is a key-question and I am very glad to answer it. After 10 years in this company and some more years worked in other companies, I have concluded now that Facebook mostly and Instagram are ways of resource development. As I have referred to previous questions too, people need more economical things to buy, so these media show them all the time from all companies the offers or sales or just special prices. More people come to stores by viewing a post on Facebook or by being influenced by a comment on a Facebook’s post. Of course, a risk of competitiveness is increasing at the same time, but I am more optimistic and concentrate on the positive factors of Social Media and Networks”. In the same line, M4, M5 and M9 supported the fact that Facebook and Instagram are both resource development for company, while recognizing the risk of competitiveness too. They just focus on the main aspect of usual posts which attract customers, especially regarding the economic part, so the development is increased than the competition of other companies.

Six out of ten participants answered that Facebook and Instagram are both resource development and risk of competitiveness for company, while four out of ten participants answered that Facebook and Instagram are a resource development for the company. With the observation of Facebook and Instagram page of the company, it can be further realized the impact of these sites on companies, competitors, customers and people.
4.10 Information and Knowledge Management regarding Facebook and Instagram pages of case company

Information and Knowledge Management is an important part of the Social Media and Social Networks for companies. For this reason, the participants were asked to answer about the management of information from customers by the company. They were also asked to explain about the impact of Facebook and Instagram on customers regarding the advertisements, sales announcements or contests than e-mails, text or mobile messages. Several different answers were found along with convincing justifications.

Firstly, M1 answered that: “Well, we mainly separate well from bad comments. We try to distil from bad comments the true ones and through them we try to improve our products or company’s performance. Most of our customers are positive to our advertisements and are pleased with our products and services. Facebook and Instagram help in promoting our sales because our page is open to everyone to visit without being afraid of pc viruses (fear that exists if they open an unknown email). Also, they have the opportunity to ask us directly about everything they want to know and receive quite rapidly the answer from us and they do not think that we annoy them through our advertisements on Facebook or Instagram in contrast to text messages that are sent directly to their mobiles”. According to this participant, Information Management is meant by controlling the comments and providing quick answers to those comments in order to satisfy the customer. According to this manager, the pc viruses or the disturbances caused by mobile messages are uncomfortable for customers than Facebook and Instagram, which (posts on social media) are not annoying and are effective for promotion and communication with people.

M2 almost in the same line claimed that: “Well, our company and especially the managers responsible for Social Media’s feedback manage the information of followers as much as they can. The positive comments are great to have, but negative comments are more important in order to rethink or correct a potential issue regarding our company or products. Regarding advertisements and especially about offers or special prices, customers act very positively with many comments about thanking or congratulating about this action. Due to the economic crisis of the country, people always search for the most suitable and lower price of products and services that someone wants to buy. So, customers are very satisfied and are coming back to our stores to buy our products years after years. Of course, the important thing is that the sales are on specific dates during a year, but the whole year many offers are made”. This manager answered almost in the same line as M1 about the management of bad and good comments. But, this participant pointed out the economic factor regarding the sales advertisements through Facebook and Instagram. People try to find the lower prices of a product, they can so fast, easily and quickly find out this information through these sites.

M3, M6 and M7 expressed almost the same opinions. For example, M3 reported that: “Well, our company tries to be specific and quickly answers to people who comment on our Facebook and Instagram pages. Especially, the Brand Manager of the company answers to all of the questions or comments. Of course, in every meeting of managers and employees we discuss some positive or negative comments in order to fix them or improve them. So, we take advantage of the comments made by customers and we realize that we are not perfect. Regarding advertisements of products or services of our
company, customers are glad for them and they usually thank us for potential offers or services. Especially, the service of taking the online ordered products from our e-shop to the customer’s home is a loved service which is favorable for most of the people. We use all kinds of information in our company such as Social Networks as well as emails and mobile messages. But we have realized that Facebook and Instagram are the most powerful means of communication for our products and sales/offers. People respond gladly and they try to buy each product they want as quickly as they can in order to get in time before either the offer was expanded or the product was finished”. These managers supported the view of the previous managers on the management of bad and good comments but the M3 participant also pointed out that in meetings between managers, all the negative comments from Facebook and Instagram are discussed in order to get them fixed. Moreover, the interviewee addressed that the company uses all the means like e-mails, mobile messages even if they believe that these two media are the most effective way for promotion and marketing functions.

On the other hand, M4 answered almost in the same line but briefly: “Well, through Facebook and Instagram, customers are informed for every activity or event we organize. The comments are always taken into account and discussed. We always try to make ourselves better by taking into consideration the customer’s comments. Having a holistic approach of the tools is better. E-mails, mobile messages and Social Media’s actions all have to be used. If promotions are communicated in every way, then you raise the number of customers”. The opinion expressed by this manager is almost similar to the previous ones.

M5 and M9 provided almost similar answers regarding the management of information from customers to company. For example, M9 answered that: “Customers’ comments are very important to us, as they help us see our customers’ preferences, their likes and dislikes. This, in turn enables us to create posts that are in accordance to these preferences as well as contact with our parent company in France about products that are sold well and which we need to bring in larger amounts as well as products that don’t go well as planned. At present, customers show that they like a post by ‘liking’ or sharing it and, in a lesser degree, by commenting. One area where we see consumers greatly responding to our content is when we create a Facebook contest. Through interacting with our clients we are better able to understand their needs and find ways to satisfy them. Thus, we are better able to create more happy customers, which is at the core of our company’s mission. Consumers respond very favourably when we announce a sales offer on Social Media and we see the traffic in our e-shop and stores increase after such posts. We believe that Social Media sales announcements and e-mails and text message announcements work synergistically to promote our sales days and bring people to our stores and website. So, we use both media to communicate with consumers. Daily, we place more emphasis on Social Media and use text messages and email on a less regular basis”. Regarding the sales of a product, the company communicates with the parent company in order to change or increase any quantity of a product. The company understands clearly the preferences of customers through Facebook and Instagram by seeing the likes or dislikes in several posts. Of course, in announcements for sales or contents, customers are active and happy to be part of it. Lastly, this participant claimed that the company uses all the means of communication, as M4 believed, but they mainly focus on Social Media.

M8 and M10 stated that the expert manager for Social Media controls the comments on Facebook and Instagram and tries to separate the positive from negative comments and
the fake comments. The management of customers’ knowledge and information on Social Media is a very important process and it needs a lot of time and experienced person/s who can perform the tasks successfully. They also mentioned that all the users are fully satisfied when the company posts about sales or offers or contests and they comment a lot, usually with positive comments.

4.11 Observation of Facebook and Instagram pages of case company

After the analysis of the answers obtained from participants regarding the interview questionnaire guide, the observation is followed. Thus, this method was used in order to show the impact of Facebook and Instagram pages of the company on customers by reporting the likes and comments in every post of these media. The timeframe for this method was 17th of July to 30th of July, 2017. For observation data analysis, several tables are illustrated which report the number of likes and comments both on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. It is important to add that all posts and comments are in Greek language, thus they are all translated into English language. Moreover, a sample of comments is presented under each table that describes analytically all the details during each day. Furthermore, it is important to mention that Facebook page of case company in Greece has over 321,733 followers and Instagram page has over 17,800 followers. Besides, a sample of screenshots regarding posts and comments of Facebook and Instagram pages of case company is illustrated in Appendix D. This observation process helps in providing useful information about the preferences of users of Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. Depending on each post, users of case company either like or comment on it or share with their friends. For acquiring new customers or increasing sales and brands, the message of each post is important as well as the Social Networks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation days / Social Media</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>Posts</td>
</tr>
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<td>17th of July</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th of July</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1</td>
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Table 10: Likes, posts and comments on 17th and 18th of July on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company

I started with observing Facebook and Instagram pages of case company on Monday, 17th of July around 10.00 o’clock in the morning. Then the Brand Manager, who is responsible for posts on Facebook and Instagram, around 13.00 o’clock posted an announcement on both pages referring to the e-shop of business and highlighting about 50% sales discounts on summer collection and an extra 10% with buying 5 products and more. On Facebook, 35 likes are made in about one hour from the post and another 16 likes are made in next few hours. One person also asked about the duration of these sales and in just half an hour the manager answered that the 50% will last till 30th of August and the extra 10% for this week only. Then the customer thanked the company for this offer and claimed that she will come to company’s store in next days. Simultaneously, on Instagram 158 likes are made in about three hours and the rest 106
likes are made during the whole day. No comments are made on Instagram page. A screenshot of this day is illustrated in Appendix D1 as well as the translation of the post into English language is given.

On Tuesday, 18th of July, I started with observing Facebook and Instagram pages of case company around 09.00 o’clock in the morning. The Brand Manager posted to both sites around 11.00 o’clock – the post was regarding a sample of clothes for all the ages in summer collection. On Facebook, 75 likes are made in about three hours and the rest 23 likes are made during the whole day. On Instagram page, 85 likes are made in next two hours and the 15 are made during the rest of the day. But, only two comments are made on Instagram post. A customer congratulated the company for the quality and design of clothes for kids. In about ten minutes, the manager answered thankfully to that customer and promised more similar quality and design for all the clothes in the future.

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<th>Observation days / Social Media</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>Posts</td>
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<tr>
<td>20th of July</td>
<td>15</td>
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Table 11: Likes, posts and comments on 19th and 20th of July on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company

On Wednesday, 19th of July, around 10.00 o’clock in the morning, I started with observing Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. Then the Brand Manager around 11.00 o’clock posted an announcement on both pages referring to the e-shop’s extra sales of summer collection products. On Facebook, 28 likes are made in about first hour from the post and next 23 likes are made in next few hours during the day. No comments are made on this post. Simultaneously, on Instagram 45 likes are made in about two hours and the rest 22 likes are made between 16.00 and 18.00 o’clock. No comments are made on Instagram page.

On Thursday, 20th of July, around 12.00, I started with observing Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. Then the Brand Manager around 14.00 posted an announcement on both pages referring to specific blue products as the color of this summer. On Facebook, 15 likes only are made in about two hours from the post. No comments are made for this post as the likes are less already. On the other hand, on Instagram, 124 likes are made in about three hours and the rest 29 likes are made during the day. No comments are made on Instagram page too. A screenshot of this day is illustrated in Appendix D2 as well as the translation of the post in English language is given.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Posts</td>
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Table 12: Likes, posts and comments on 21st and 22nd of July on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21st of July</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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On Friday, 21st of July around 09.00 o’clock in the morning, I started with observing Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. The expected post on Facebook is made around 11.00 o’clock by reporting the most wonderful thing in one day which is the smile. This post leads people to a blog’s article which is analyzing the happiness and emotions of having a baby or a child in the house. This post is updated only on Facebook and no post is posted on Instagram page on this day. The first 63 likes are made in only first half an hour and the rest 40 likes are made in next four hours.

Next day, on Saturday 22nd of July, around 11.00 o’clock, I started with the observation of Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. The Brand Manager around 12.00 o’clock posted the daily post by referring to pyjamas and bodysuits for kids and special offers. This post generated a very few likes on Facebook page because it was a free day especially for most parents and kids. On the other hand, this post generated enough likes on Instagram page. First 135 likes are made in first hour and rest 63 likes are made in the rest of the day. A screenshot for this day is illustrated in Appendix D3 as well as the translation into English language of the day’s post is given.

Table 13: Likes, posts and comments on 23rd and 24th of July on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company

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<th>Observation days / Social Media</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Likes</td>
<td>Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd of July</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th of July</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
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On sunny Sunday, 23rd of July, around 10.00 o’clock, I started with the observation of Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. Around 11.00 o’clock, a post was updated which was about a picture of a little boy wearing a summerset in order to promote the summer products of the company. But only 12 likes were the reaction of followers to this post on Facebook page. On the other hand, 159 likes were the reaction on Instagram page, where 132 likes were made in the first hour and next 27 likes were made till the end of the day. A customer posted the emoticon “heart” as a comment, obviously it shows her preferences for these summer products. A screenshot is illustrated in Appendix D4.

Next day on Monday, 24th of July, around 11.00 o’clock started a new week. I followed the same procedure as last week and I started observing Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. Around 13.00 o’clock, the expected post was made by viewing a little girl wearing a beautiful dress of the company’s collection and saying “Good morning”. This post generated 20 likes and no comments were made. On the other hand, this post generated 173 likes on Instagram and no comments were made again.
On Tuesday, 25th of July, around 10.00 o’clock, I started observing Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. Around 12.00 o’clock, a post was updated regarding the company’s shoes for summer collection. It seemed that this post was very attractive because it had 56 likes during three hours. All the likes are made really fast, so maybe this post and specifically the promoted shoes were liked by the customers. On Instagram page, 255 likes are made on this post but the first 230 are made in two hours.

On Wednesday, 26th of July, around 11.00 o’clock, the first post was updated. So, I started the observation immediately. The post was referring to summer dresses and was leading customers to e-shop of the company in order to view more of them. The likes for this post were 73 with four comments. These dresses seemed to be favourable to customers due to their positive comments about these dresses. Two customers asked questions and the Brand Manager quickly answered to them. The first customer asked about the online shopping. In specific, she asked if she could also use her member card for online shopping and how. Then in almost half an hour, the Brand Manager answered positively to that customer that she could use her member card for online shopping and gave her the number of calling center for more details if she wanted to ask anything else. The next comment was regarding the dresses. Specifically, another customer asked about the quantity of dresses in stock. Then, the Brand Manager answered that unfortunately most of the dresses have been sold during summer, but she mentioned that next collection is near and many dresses are coming. On Instagram page, this post had 278 likes where the first 187 are made in almost two hours and the rest ones during the whole day. A screenshot for this day is illustrated in Appendix D5 as well as the translation into English language of the post and a screenshot of the comments which were made, are given.

<table>
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<td>Likes: 255, Posts: 1, Comments: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26th of July</td>
<td>Likes: 73, Posts: 1, Comments: 4</td>
<td>Likes: 278, Posts: 1, Comments: 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Likes, posts and comments on 25th and 26th of July on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company

On Thursday, 27th of July, around 11.00 o’clock, I started the observation of Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. The Brand Manager had already posted around
an hour ago the expected post which was about the Safe Water Sports. The Safe Water Sports is a voluntary initiative which was launched in the summer of 2015 with the main goal of enhancing the safety in water and water sports, and within a short time managed to have many supporters from different sectors. So, this group was cooperating with company in order to teach the kids and parents too about the safety in water sports and generally in the sea. This post had 205 likes in almost two hours, so as I understood that it was very interesting and demanding to customers. Although Instagram posts of case company used to have many likes, in this post 128 likes were made. Not a few but not so many likes as on Facebook page. A screenshot for this day is illustrated in Appendix D6 as well as the translation into English language of the post is given.

On Friday, 28th of July, around 09.00 o’clock, I started observing again Facebook and Instagram pages of case company. Around 11.00 o’clock, a post was updated regarding the high discounts sales offer of company up to 60% discounts on most of the products. 19 likes were made in almost whole day, while 130 likes were made on Instagram in three hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation days / Social Media</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29th of July</td>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30th of July</td>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Likes, posts and comments on 29th and 30th of July on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company

On Saturday, 29th of July, around 10.00 o’clock, I started observing Facebook and Instagram pages of the case company. Around 12.00 o’clock, the expected post was updated and it was about a reminder of summer’s sales up to 60% in all stores and e-shop of the company. On Facebook, the first 39 likes were made in about 1 hour and next 17 likes were made in next three hours. On the other hand, 198 likes were made on Instagram in almost half an hour and rest 108 likes were made in the rest of the day. No comments were made on any of these Social media. In other words, both posts did not generate any comments.

Last day was Sunday, I observed Facebook and Instagram pages of case company on 30th of July around 10.00 0’clock. Around 11.00 o’clock, the earlier post was updated. It was about some advices and suggestions regarding reading a book on the beach by kids. It suggested some websites for favorite books which could make children happier. 18 likes were made to this post on Facebook in about three hours, while 205 likes were made on Instagram in about five hours. No comments were made, as the post was linked the followers to other websites for choosing a book. A screenshot for this day is illustrated in Appendix D7 and the translation into English language of the post is also given.

Several fake comments from customers to case company’s Social Media usually refer to the quality of products or the customer representatives or the processes of company. For example, “the quality of jeans is very low and after each wash the trousers are getting
worse!!! I will not buy from you anymore” is a fake comment, it is easy to understand from the last part of the comment that the commenter is definitely a competitor. But, in previous posts, many customers have claimed the perfect quality of jeans and of course replied to this post by supporting the company. Another example “I went to the Mall Athens store and the people were rude, they did not try to service me and had no interest to the customers in general”. This comment is also a fake comment as it refers to the customers’ representative in general and does not refer to a specific name of an employee. Other customers also reply to this comment in the same way but sometimes people can agree with this post. Thus, the fake comment turns into a negative comment. Of course, the manager of Social Media always replies with kindness and diplomatically.

In a similar style, negative comments like “I bought a pair of shoes and were not so resistant to rain, as the customer representative told me” or “I made an online order from e-shop seven days ago and I have no message till now about the delivery date” are replied gently too and of course, the company makes the best to solve the issue and service the customer immediately.

Regarding the contents of the comments, my observation of the Facebook and Instagram found the same as the interviewees’ reporting, as mentioned above.

The implications of the likes and comments on the Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) in the case company have been discussed in detail in Discussion Chapter. This study counts likes and explores the contents of the comments (positive, negative and fake comments) on the Social Media in order to understand their impacts on Greek retail business and examine the research questions of this study.

4.12 Summary

All the participants were willing to share their knowledge and experience regarding Social Media and Social Networks in the case company. All the interviews were conducted in a friendly and familiar mood. The answers were fully focused on each question and the interviewees tried to answer as best as they could. The total results of each answer are specific and the majority of participants were having similar views on each question. This is because all the managers of the company work in a cooperative manner and most of them have specific strategy regarding the Social Media of the company.

All the questions in the interview questionnaire guide have been asked according to the research sub-questions in order to explore several themes and specifically the main research question “Why the use of Social Media in Greek retail businesses is a way of development or a way of increasing risk of competitiveness or both of them or none of them?”

Analytically, the empirical findings regarding the research sub-questions are discussed in Discussion Chapter, in which all the sub-questions and generally the answers for the exploration of this research are compared and contrasted with past studies.
5 Discussions

This study has answered the following questions during the course of this research:

1. How Social Media are used in Greek retail businesses? What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses?
2. Why do companies fail to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media to conduct various business functions in the Greek retail sector? How can they be successful in using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in Greek retail businesses?
3. How do Greek retail companies use Social Media to perform customer knowledge management?

The empirical research findings, including the results of each of the research questions, are discussed below according to guidelines of researchers (Anfara and Mertz, 2006; Hart, 2005; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2001). In this chapter, discussions of the empirical findings have been done from the perspective of the relevant literature in the field.

5.1 Discussion on the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses

According to interviewees, the case company uses mostly Facebook and Instagram sites. These two media are the most preferred and usable because of their popularity and easiness of use. Greek retail businesses mostly use these sites by uploading at least one post every day in order to promote or advertise a product or a special price or a contest. Of course, Facebook and Instagram are used for performing various business functions, such as marketing and communication actions, promotion of products or services, announcements for hiring staff, reviews for products or for visiting more directly the electronic shop of the company. Moreover, photos or videos of stores or inside of the company can be posted on these media for communication reasons with customers. It is obvious that these two sites are the most popular for the majority of people and they are the best way through which marketing and other functions can be conducted extensively. During the economic crisis in Greece, Social Media are generally considered as the economic ways to attract more customers or do better promotion about the products of the company.

Although Facebook and Instagram are the top Social Media which are widely used by the case company, Twitter and LinkedIn are also used. Of course, the frequency of use is not the same. Twitter is used once or twice a week and LinkedIn is used even more seldom. LinkedIn is basically used for hiring reasons. LinkedIn is the best way for recruiting Human Resources because there are many professional profiles and the appropriate manager is able to learn important information of suitable candidates before the interview. On the other hand, Twitter is getting known to Greek audience recently, so the managers try to use it more frequently. Lastly, Yammer is another media which is used for organizing purposes between the employees of the company. According to participants, this application helps in scheduling meetings, fixing deadlines and especially arranging cooperation between managers and employees.
These empirical findings are consistent with the view of Edosomwan et al. (2011) and Brennan and Schafer (2010) that Social Media are beneficial for communication and marketing of companies. This study identifies that the Social Media are used for other purposes, which have been described in next section.

5.2 Discussion on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in using Social Media in Greek retail businesses

The usage of Social Media and Social Networks has several strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the case company. First of all, the increasing of marketing and reputation of the brand is the most important strength. Through Social Media, the case company becomes more popular and favourite for many people who will be potential customers. Furthermore, the communication between customers or managers is another important strength. The managers can communicate with any employee through a Social Media tool in order to organize several tasks. On the other hand, customers can communicate with managers of the company in order to ask information about products or services. The free access to videos, advertisements, contests or discounts consist of several strengths as well as the faster hiring process of future employees. Specifically, the most important benefit is the attraction of customers. When a consumer follows a retail company, then he/she can find out the prices of a favourite product or a discount on another product or even more a contest in which the prize is exciting. So, the consumer would buy either from online shop or the closest store from home in order to take advantage of a special price. Thus, the traffic of people in stores or electronic store increases and the company becomes both popular and profitable. Despite that, the online communication between managers and customers is another important benefit. When a customer asks about information or complains about something, then the manager tries to answer quickly and amicably. So, the reliability of company is increased and the preference of customer for the products of company is increased as well. Also, the hiring process is becoming safer and faster because of professional profiles on LinkedIn; for example, managers can choose the candidates for interviews more carefully. As a result of them, the marketing, reputation and safe hiring benefits consist of important reasons for using Social Media in a Greek retail company.

Regarding the positive comments of customers on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company, the managers collect a lot of information from them. Of course, the more positive comments the Social Media tool generates, the most positive image the company gains. For example, a customer may comment positively about the customer service of employees in stores or about a specific sales person. Another comment could be about a special price of a product or the quality of items or the electronic shop effectiveness. The company utilizes these positive comments in order to promote its best quality products and services to a broader audience. Of course, this kind of comments attract new customers and people who may want to come to the stores and see the reality of these comments. It is important to mention that the managers always answer to the positive comments in order to thank the people that commented. When thanked, they feel more valued, then they become more active, spread positive information about the company and its products, also order new items.

The likes on these Social Media of case company play an important role. If the likes are more than usual, then the sales increase a lot due to an exceptional offer or a preferable product. Additionally, the image of the company is updated every time the likes of
several posts are increased. Also, if a post about a specific product generates a lot of likes, then the company will order additional items from the supplier in order to sell more of these to customers and then the product will be a kind of “best seller” of the collection. In the next season, by using these products, the company draws new customers, sell more to existing customers, and improves its brand image and reputation. On the other hand, when the likes are less than usual, then the post is not successful and may harm the image of company. In the next season, the company either does not sell these products or sells them by significantly updating. The likes related information is shared among several employees of the case company and its suppliers, and is used regularly. The likes related information is very valuable to case company as mentioned above. The Brand Manager mainly watches the likes on these Social Media of case company in order to see the resonance of each post. For example, if a post is about a specific offer, the managers watch the impact of the specific offer on customers. Similarly, if a post is about a promotion of a collection or a specific product, the managers watch the sell-out of this collection or the specific product.

Regarding the weaknesses of the usage of Social Media and Social networks in case company, the increasing of competition consists of the most important and most-told weakness, according to the interviewees. Almost all the companies use daily in high degree the Social Media and Social Networks in order to attract people and communicate their products. The competition is increasing and the customers are shared in many similar companies. Also, these tools need a good amount of time and a kind of knowledge in order to use them effectively. The use of Social Media in Greek retail businesses poses several drawbacks too. The general aim of each company of using Social Media is to operate them correctly and carefully. So, a manager or more people have to take care of them and be responsible for them. Thus, more personnel and time are needed in order to utilize Social Media effectively in each company. Especially, in Greek retail businesses, which face a lot of economic problems due to economic crisis of the country, it is difficult to hire or have separate people who will be responsible only for Social Media. This fact, in combination with the time, is the most important barrier of Social Media use in retail companies. Moreover, the negative comments or complains may be harmful for company’s reputation. Many times negative comments are reported by customers who can be dissatisfied with the company. But other times some negative comments are posted in purpose by competitors who want to “ruin” the company’s popularity. Thus, the people who are responsible for Social Media have to be very careful in order to distinguish the customer’s negative comments from competitor’s negative comments. The competition is increasing too due to the majority of similar companies and their posts regarding sales or special prices.

The opportunities of using Social Media and Social networks in case company are the chance of broader events and announcements, which could be beneficial for customers. Also, the economic factor is a great opportunity. More and more customers choose the case company for buying its products which is generating high profits for the company throughout the year. Additionally, when a new product is introduced, then it is becoming more popular quickly that can be bought by many people.

Companies monitor social media of their competitors. They observe which products are selling well, what their features and benefits are, what products are not selling well, and collect related information regularly. The lack of control over Social Media and Social Networks is also an important threat for the case company. Many negative or strategically harmful comments can be made in order to damage the company. Of
course, the responsible manager should answer such comments with good manner and with no offence. The negative comments of followers on Facebook and Instagram pages of the case company cause harm to the image of the brand. Sometimes, if some customers are dissatisfied with the customer service of a store, they post it on Social Media. Usually, they refer to specific sales person who may be responsible for any bad service. The managers always answer to this kind of comments in order to calm the customer and encourage him/her to visit the company again. The negative comments make the company understood that a company is never completely perfect, consistently need to put effort for improving, offer training in customer service of those employees whose names are mentioned.

The fake comments are very harmful for the case company. Often either competitive companies or other people comment negatively on purpose in order to defame the company and make customers buy their products from other companies. The sale of top quality products can drop significantly for fake comments against those products. Of course, these fake comments are easily understandable to managers who try to either respond them convincingly or delete them as soon as possible. The company also tries to block those posters who repeatedly post fake comments. Some people are trying regularly to post fake comments. The fake comments are very harmful for the case company. A lot of time from employees is consumed to find the fake comments and reply them as quickly as possible. They damage the image of the company, decrease sales of those products against which fake comments have been made. Companies have lack of control over the contents of the posts made by customers on Social Media.

Among the various important empirical findings discussed above regarding Social Media’s benefits, weaknesses and threats the following are consistent with the past research: increasing of marketing and reputation of the brand, communication between the employees and customers about products and services, negative comments or complains from customers about products or prices or customer services (Carraher, Parnell and Spillan, 2009. Edosomwan et al., 2011; Fuchs, 2014). This study also reports some new findings as described here. Managers can use Social Media (e.g. Yammer) for organizing, implementing and monitoring a variety of tasks in a highly cost effective manner, which has been described in detail in later section of this chapter. A company can quickly develop very high potential products by thoroughly examining the likes, positive comments and negative comments on similar products. The products which are already selling well, they can be further improved by examining the likes, positive comments and negative comments. Competitors can very easily steal all or most of the product information of the top selling products of the company by monitoring Social Media, then develop similar products and start selling with lower prices.

5.3 Discussion on the reasons for failure in using integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in the Greek retail sector

Most of the Greek companies fail to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media. For example, in case company there are several reasons for this failure, according to the interviewees. Firstly, the main reason for this failure is the lack of skilled personnel in current economic circumstances. Due to the economic crisis of Greece, the Greek company has only employees who are valuable and appropriate for each sector. So, the workload has increased for the person who is assigned to perform
Social Media related activities and as a result, this employee cannot afford the management of the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media. In order to check and control multiple Social Media, the responsible individual should focus on this section only and be able to act quickly. Thus, the lack of skilled employees is a key barrier for using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media.

Another important reason is the lack of knowledge in multiple Social Media that is rapidly changing. The personnel need more experience and training regarding multiple Social Media in order to be effective and efficient in using Social Media. Of course, the company is putting high efforts in order to start using multiple Social Media. Specifically, the company is already using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Yammer but there is always room for improvement.

Extensive literature search found that no earlier research has dealt with the reasons for failure in using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media.

5.4 Discussion on the reasons for being successful in using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in Greek retail businesses

Following the previous section, these barriers should be overcome in order to utilize the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media. Specifically, the company should hire more people with appropriate knowledge and skills who will be useful and responsible for the use of current and future Social Media. Of course, the future plan for the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media will exist as a future objective of the company. The newly recruited personnel should be provided with appropriate and effective training in order to enhance their skillset in using and managing multiple Social Media.

As a result, the company will be able to use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and the results will be many. The communication with customers will be increasing because of the direct answer of manager through the most Social Media sites. So, more customers will join the business and more profits will have the company itself. The use of multiple Social Media leads to better and effective marketing of products and services. With the aid of a good marketing plan, all the products and services will be advertised in the best possible way in order to attract the customers and make them come back repeatedly to company’s stores or buy from its e-shop.

Extensive literature search found that no earlier research has dealt with the reasons for being successful in using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in Greek retail businesses.

5.5 Discussion on the differences between present and the time when there was economic crisis regarding the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses

Specifically, in 2010, Social Media were significantly underdeveloped and less popular than now. Also, the economic factor in Greek companies was better so the businesses used other marketing or promotion activities, such as TV advertisements or radio spots.
Of course, these activities are more expensive; however, during that earlier time, more companies were able to invest in them. The important thing is that companies did not use Social Media for their marketing functions to a greater extent earlier; during that time they mostly used Social Media for communicating with customers and answering to negative or fake comments. Extensive literature search found that no studies have dealt with the above-mentioned Social Media related issues in 2010.

Currently, Social Media are mostly used for communication and marketing reasons. This finding is consistent with the finding of Constantinides and Fountain (2008), Brooks, Heffner and Henderson (2014) and Ramsay (2010). The companies invest more on Social Media’s potential and try to promote their products or services or brand names to people in order to attract and retain more customers. Of course, these days, individuals have more profiles on Social Media, they get used to them usually at all ages. Thus, companies feel “secure” to use Social Media, because they know that this new way of marketing is highly effective till now and more people come to the stores of company. According to interviewees, people get in touch with company more frequently because of the Social Media. Customers usually come to stores in order to find out a special price or product which is favorite for him/her. In fact, technology has advanced greatly and especially the power of Social Media too, so currently Social Media is used extensively in Greek retail businesses.

5.6 Discussion on the future usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses

Greek retail businesses do not use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media currently. However, they have the plans to use them in the future. For example, the case company is currently widely using Facebook and Instagram pages for marketing and communication purposes. But the usage of other Social Media could be highly helpful in these purposes as well.

YouTube or Twitter or Yammer or Google+ or Amazon or any other Social Media and Social Network could be used by companies for performing multiple business functions. YouTube could be used frequently by managers in order to upload videos of stores and present the collections of clothes, photos of happy and helpful employees, advertisements of company or contests. YouTube also has the comment option, so customers can comment either positively or negatively, select like or dislike and get their answer quickly. Of course, like Facebook and Instagram, like and dislike are the main characteristics of YouTube which are useful for managers in order to know the preferences of people.

Twitter can also be used like Facebook or Instagram by uploading posts regarding sales, discounts, and contests or referring to the electronic shop for better research in shopping. Creation of hashtags can make a company very popular and many individuals could follow the company. Google+ is in the same line as Twitter. Google+ is also an effective and useful Social Media tool.

Yammer is an organizing tool that is used for scheduling meetings, etc. between managers and employees. It is very useful for their daily activities. Managers can organize better, schedule activities including meetings, can fix deadlines, monitor progress, etc. The case company could use it more frequently in order to get organized.
better and create a trustworthy and cooperative feeling between managers and employees. Amazon was suggested by one participant for ratings and reviews for products. It would be an effective tool to use for this purpose. Customers may also see company’s products on these Social Media and be interested in buying them electronically or by visiting stores.

Generally, future use of Social Media would be even better and wide spread. Social Media’s functionalities will increase and marketing will be done through these Social Media sites mostly. Currently, people spend a lot of time by searching on these sites, so this habit will increase in the future as well.

5.7 Discussion on Facebook and Instagram of the case company: A resource development or risk of increased competition

The usage of Social Media and Social Networks in the case company is a resource development and an increased risk of competitiveness at the same time, according to research results. Thus, from an economic point of view, Social Media and Social Networks are profitable because they promote either the brand or a specific product and customers buy more often from this company. People buy more products from a retail company if they are satisfied with the products and services of the company and if they follow it on Social Media. Each company creates attractive posts and advertisements in order to bring customers to the stores. So, the company makes more money from the use of Social Media and Networks.

5.8 Discussion on Social Media’s information and knowledge management in Greek retail businesses

Knowledge Management is a very important process in the case company. From one point, the exchange of knowledge among employees by using Social Media becomes a vital part for a business as it helps in increasing the range and richness of their networks and gathering information about their work. For example, Yammer is a Social Media tool which is extensively used by the managers of the case company in order to communicate and improve their daily programs and a variety of tasks. This is a new finding of this research.

The employees of the case company regularly use Social Media to capture customers’ information and knowledge, share it with other employees, and utilize it. This finding is consistent with the finding of Naslund (2010) that Social Media support knowledge sharing.

In the future, an online blog between the sales people is going to be created by the case company for discussing several themes, such as problems with customers or products, preferences of consumers or the status of each day about stores.

The case company always watches the preferences of customers through Social Media. The responsible manager tries to communicate with them and answer to any questions on a daily basis. This exchange of information creates the knowledge for manager about the preferences of customers. After assessing this knowledge, the manager categorizes all the information and shares it with other managers and employees of the company. In
the final step, the contextualization is applied and the knowledge becomes action in order to satisfy the customers’ preferences. This is another new finding of this research.

Customers regularly posts comments on the products on Facebook and Instagram that the case company is selling. The company is selling thousands of different products. The numbers of comments are huge that are scattered over different Social Media. These comments include highly valuable information about strengths and weaknesses of the products, customers’ preferences, etc. The company is trying to capture and utilize this information, but unable to do that effectively, as it needs a huge amount of time for employees. This finding supports the view of Samoilenko and Nahar (2012; 2013) that the knowledge could be scattered over various Social Media and as a result, it is difficult to be captured, managed and utilized.

Information and Knowledge Management on Social Media is a very important factor for companies. All the customers who may comment or complain on Facebook, for example, can enhance or ruin a company’s reputation. Of course, the appropriate managers should control these comments and try to answer them politely, correctly and quickly.

Specifically, the comments are made may be real by satisfied or dissatisfied customers. For example, a loyal customer in a company may congratulate or thank to company for a product or service or special price or for winning in a contest. So, this comment is easily answered by manager, who also thank the customer and tries to be friendly with him/her. Thus, other people who observe the posts of the company are more open-minded and willing to visit the e-shop or store to buy products and as a result, the reputation of company is increasing. On the other hand, the negative comments are a difficult issue for the responsible manager. For example, a customer could complain about the low quality of a product or the high price of a product or late reply to customer’s enquiry or the non-existing service by sales people. In this case, the manager should answer quickly to this customer and support both the company and the individual. Of course, the major objective is not to lose any customer of the company, so the answer must be wise and strategically posted. Moreover, there are fake comments which are made by competitors in purpose. For example, a seemingly simple user could be a manager of any competitive company who comments negatively about a product or a price. So, other people notify this negative comment and it may affect the status of the company in a negative way as well.

The important thing is that the parent company monitors its subsidiaries in each country; thus, it may be risky for managers to be punished or even fired for this kind of reason. So, according to interviewees, the real negative comments should be discussed and a solution needs to be found quickly in order to have most of the customers satisfied.

5.9 Discussion on the key concepts and parameters

The case company uses several terms/concepts in their daily activities. Firstly, the Web 2.0 is used daily by the case company in order to promote its products and communicate with customers. Generally, Web 2.0 allows online users to interact and collaborate with others based on a Social Media dialogue. These online users are considered as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community. Examples of Web 2.0 include Social Media and Social Networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.),
blogs, wikis, video sharing sites (YouTube) and Web applications. Thus, the case company uses this concept by creating its online website through which customers can order their favourite products. Also, the managers of case company use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other Social Media for communication and advertising reasons as well as for increasing the brand awareness. The use of Web 2.0 increases the competitive advantage of the company. For example, the case company offers daily discounts up to 50% on many products through Social Media and website.

Furthermore, Shopper Marketing is another concept which is used by the case company. Specifically, the e-shop and Social Networks of the case company, associated with this concept, help customers in ordering several products directly. Thus, an effective platform has been created in order to promote the products and services of case company to potential customers. Paquette (2013) refers to this concept as it focuses on the interaction between businesses and customers. Thus, the case company increases the brand awareness to customers.

Moreover, Virtual Brand Communities is a very familiar concept in the case company. Many customers of the company create some groups with same interests; for example, on Facebook, ask and answers questions and give feedback to other customers. Thus, the participation and trustworthiness are increasing, as Casalo et al. (2008) refers too. In the same though, Consumer Generated Advertising is a familiar concept to case company because customers are willing to share information about any discounts or offers of a company. In fact, most of the companies have created their own Social Media and people communicate and ask various information through Social Media. The Social Media Manager of the company needs to answer regularly to all questions of customers and be specific in the answers.

Viral Advertising consists of an important part of marketing plan of the case company. The company uses as many tools as it can in order to be advertised virally and be well-known not only all over Greece but also globally, as it can easily tap foreign customers through the Internet. It uses TV advertisements, radio advertisements, newspaper advertisements, advertisements on popular TV shows and of course Social Media advertisements have a fundamental role in the business growth in the case company.

Regarding the effects of implementation of Web 2.0 in retail business as shown in Table 1 (Jain and Ganesh, 2007), the case company uses several “content”, “collaboration” and “commerce” parameters.

From the “content” parameters, the case company uses podcasts, RSS feeds and mashups in order to attract more customers and make them friendly with the company. From the “collaboration” parameters, except wikis and discussion forums, all others are used by the case company.

From “commerce parameters”, the contextual shopping help is provided whenever a customer wants to buy a product and needs to ask a question, a live agent is 24 hours there for him/her.
6 Conclusion and Implications

This chapter concludes the overall study by discussing its findings and the implications. Section 6.1 presents the contributions of this study. In sections 6.2, the implications for businesses are described, while in section 6.3 the limitations of the study are analyzed. Section 6.4 presents reflections regarding the research and section 6.5 suggests some recommendations for further research.

Social Media provide several benefits to businesses if they can be used successfully. If a company does not use the power of various social media, it will have high chance of losing its competitiveness in marketing communication, when its competitors use the integrated power of social media, their websites and other communication tools. Therefore, this study conducts research on the usage of Social Media in retail businesses in Greece and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in using Social Media in Greek retail businesses. Specifically, it explores if the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses is either a way of development or a way of increasing the risk of competitiveness or both in the Greek market of retail companies or none of them.

This study has been conducted by reviewing the existing literature on the topic, observing consumers on Facebook and Instagram of the case company, interviewing experts from the case company and analyzing the empirical data.

6.1 Contributions of the study

This study deals with a holistic approach of Social Media usage in Greek retail businesses. The study is novel and important in a number of ways. Extensive literature search revealed that no earlier research was conducted on the research problem of this study. Thus the contributions of this study are novel. This study reports several new findings which have been described in detail in Discussion Chapter. This study has utilized both interview and observation of Social Media as data collection methods, which no other study has used earlier to carry out an explorative case study research in this field. This is another novel-ness of this study. Using both of these methods has improved the richness of the study. This study has used thematic analysis (both top down and bottom up approaches) for analyzing the qualitative data. The findings of the study can be useful to retail companies in Greek and other countries about how they can significantly benefit from the usage of Social Media in a variety of ways by avoiding the risks.

The purpose of this study was the justifications of using Social Media in Greek retail businesses. Specifically, this study explored if this use consists of a resource development or a risk of increased competitiveness or both or none of them. Through the analysis of empirical data, this study found that the answer of “both of them” is the most correct. In fact, using Social Media in Greek retail businesses consists of both resource development and risk of increased competitiveness. The use of Social Media in Greek retail businesses can facilitate better communication with customers and promotion of products to a broader audience that increases sales significantly and its reputation as well. On the other hand, the use of Social Media in Greek retail businesses can increase the competition between similar companies. Most of the companies observe their competitors in order to know about the sales, products or actions regarding
the attraction of customers. Thus, all the companies try to be the best in their sectors in order to attract more and more customers.

This study has also contributed in the way that Greek retail businesses use Social Media. Several business functions can be performed through the use of Social Media, such as marketing and communication, organizing collaboration between employees, easily hiring qualified staff, getting reviews for products, etc. Facebook and Instagram are among the top and most popular Social Media for Greek retail businesses to attract more customers and build the reputation of companies.

This study explores the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in using Social Media in Greek retail businesses. The major strengths of Social Media are the faster promotion of products, services and brand names, attraction of customers and communication with them, quick and complete selling of many products, increasing reputation, free access to videos, ads and contests, fast-hiring of qualified staff, and better management of employees, supports in helping high potential new products development and updating of existing products radically, organizing, management of various tasks. Despite of these, the increasing of competition, too many fake and negative comments on Facebook, lack of control, and stealing of product ideas related information of top selling products, for example, are the major threats of using Social Media. Fake and negative comments need to be monitored regularly, and to be addressed them immediately. This is because they can ruin the reputation of the company, as they can have immediate, high negative impact on sales of those items on which fake or negative comments have been posted. It consumes lots of time from the employees who are knowledgeable in customer service to perform the aforementioned activities. The major weaknesses of the usage of Social Media include performing Social Media related various tasks are highly time-consuming, lack of knowledge of employees, more skills of specific employees required, and complain concerns. The opportunities include broader events and announcements, acquisition of new customers, generating economic benefits, and fast communication of a product.

The use of integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media can bring high benefits to Greek retail businesses; however there are several reasons for not doing it. The lack of skilled personnel and knowledge in Social Media of a company are the important justifications for the failure of using them. But, there is always room for improvement through the hiring of suitable employees in Social Media’s section and providing them with more training in order to make them experts and be able to organize and control them in the best way.

Furthermore, in earlier time during the economic crisis in Greece, the use of Social Media in Greek retail businesses was different than currently. The technology of these sites was not so popular earlier for companies and individuals as well as the budgets of companies were higher therefore they were able to advertise through TV or radio than Social Media. Currently, the use of Facebook and Instagram is a daily habit for most of the people even for companies, so the use and preference for these media are higher. Of course, some Social Media or Networks are not used by Greek retail companies that could easily be used. However, companies have the plans to use several Social Media in the future.

Lastly, the Information and Knowledge Management is another contribution made by this research. The management of comments (positive, negative and fake comments) by
responsible people of the company is a main daily task which is highly important due to the possibility of receiving negative comments and the need for providing a quick answer. The real negative comments should be taken into consideration seriously by companies, get them solved quickly or handle them properly and improve the company performance. Through social media, retail businesses can easily get suggestions from customers about the products’ performances and their buying experiences, what new products customers would like to buy, what companies can do to improve the social media sites and web stores that are buyer friendly, which problems customers are facing to buy from the e-shop and stores. Then companies can manage and utilize this information to increase their sales, solve problems, improve performance and achieve growth through sales.

6.2 Implications for businesses

Companies are trying to use Social Media to remain competitive in an intensely competitive environment, to improve information and knowledge management and business performance. Most of the companies fail to achieve the aforementioned objectives. Thus, it becomes important for companies to gain an understanding of how to use Social Media to achieve the aforementioned objectives. The results of this research could be useful in providing such understanding.

By using the research results, companies will obtain a variety of benefits, such as learn the current usage of Social Media in Greek retail sector; know about various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of using Social Media in business; the reasons for success and failure of using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in performing business functions; and how they can manage all the information taken from Social Media and Social Networks and make better decision and performance.

Moreover, the study is important for current as well as future ICT and Social Media-driven business environment. The companies will continue using Social Media and Social Networks for performing many business functions regularly. Marketing, communication, product development, information and knowledge management, competitive intelligence, hiring, are some business functions of a company which Social Media and Social Networks will be responsible for. Especially, this prosperity of Internet-based technology will transform the functions of businesses to electronic form with the great aid of Social Media and Social Networks.

6.3 Limitations of the study

The current study has some limitations that are described analytically below. This study has been investigated using a single case study method. One frequent criticism of the single case study method has been that the findings are difficult to generalize (Bonoma, 1985; Bariff and Ginzberg, 1982), as they are based on small sample and qualitative subjective data.

In this study, the investigated company was a Greek retail company. The research results are based on the investigations of a company within one country. Thus, the research results may need to use with caution because the research results may not represent social media use with different national cultures. For instance, if the same
questions were asked to Japanese companies in Japan, slightly different results may have been obtained.

The company investigated in this study was a large multinational company. The company had a wide range of skills and high amount of financial resources. If small or mid-sized companies are examined, then the research findings may differ a bit from the findings of this research due to their lack of human and financial resources. Generalizations based on this study should be approached with caution due to the limitations mentioned above.

Some of the above limitations were overcome by conducting interviews with highly knowledgeable thirteen people of a large retail company that is highly successful and has been maintaining business for many years, and by making extended observations, each of the research questions has been dealt with and answered sufficiently.

6.4 Reflections

By doing this study, I have learnt a lot on a variety of important issues. It was very interesting and useful to learn about the usage of Social Media and Social Networks in Greek retail businesses. I learned how Greek retail businesses use Social Media and Social Networks in their professional performance and how useful they are in various business functions such as communication, marketing, high potential new products development and updating of existing products radically, organizing, management of various tasks, information and knowledge management, etc. The SWOT analysis helped me to understand deeply about all the sides of this concept. I was alarmed to learn the numerous serious threats and risks of the Social Media. For example, Social Media can destroy the image of the company quickly by fake and negative comments. Social Media can also ruin or harm the business of companies through the theft of product ideas related information of top selling products. As I work in the case company, I learned more extensively about the importance of Social Media and Networks for a business.

Besides, the current and preferred usages of Social Media and Social Networks in case company, the future use of other Social Media were discussed by the interviewees. It was very enlightening to learn about the huge impacts the Social Media will have in the future. Facebook and Instagram were the most preferred and successful Social Networks that are used by the case company and generally by the most of the Greek retail companies. There are some Social Media which are not currently used by the case company, but company wants to use them for business purposes in the future.

During this study, while observing the interactions of people on Facebook and Instagram pages of case company, I was not quite sure about how to use them in my research. But, in the meantime I understood that this observation is very representative as it shows the real life reactions of people who communicate with the case company by using these Social Media either with posting or replying to posts. By going through the posts, I understood how immensely valuable information the posts contain. It is very difficult to capture and utilize all these highly valuable information, as the amount of information is huge and the company has inadequate people for Social Media. I was very astonished to see that people are often trying to post fake comments to damage the company.
Furthermore, the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media and how difficult it is to be achieved in the Greek retail sector was a demandable task. I learned this concept by doing literature review and noticed how ideal would be if all the companies managed to use this. The difference of current using of Social Media and Social Networks than seven years ago was an important lesson for me. I realized the huge change which took place in only seven years about these sites and how whole societies have incorporated them. I understood the impact of economic crisis of the country in Greek businesses and why more and more people are using Social Media despite the economic crisis. Moreover, I fully understood the significance of Social Media and Social Network’s information provided by customers to the company. A huge amount of information is taken every day from these sites and it is truly important how they are managed by the experts of a company. Social Media can be used in a variety of innovative ways and can have high impact on the competitiveness and performance of companies.

A difficult task was the lack of empirical research on Social Media in the context of Greek businesses. The literature review mostly dealt with Social Media use in other countries worldwide. Of course, I relied on several studies (Paquette, 2013; Shawndra, Provost and Volinsky, 2006; Costantinides et al., 2008; Hansen, Shneiderman, B. and Smith, 2011; Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides and Alarcón-del-Amo, 2014; Ramanathan, Subramanian and Parrott, 2017) that helped me to introduce and analyse many concepts around this topic. Therefore, I had to do literature review on several topics of Social Media such as communication literature, knowledge management literature, etc.

The literature search and review was challenging, it seemed like a never ending task as hundreds of new journal articles are published each week. Extensive literature search found that the studies of these published articles have not dealt with any of my research questions.

A detailed interview questionnaire guide was also developed which was reviewed several times by my supervisor. This was another demandable task for me as I learned how to prepare and form an interview questionnaire guide which is addressed to managers of a company. What questions should I ask, in what way, how to control the amount of time spent, were the most important lessons for me. Of course, some interviewees were very busy. Thus, it was a challengeable task to get access to them and collect adequate amounts of data. I made repeated attempts that helped me to collect adequate amounts of data. Some interviewees were unwilling to share data that were strategic in nature. I assured them that no confidential data will be revealed, which helped me to collect adequate amount of data. Some interviewees were overworked and tired. I made several contacts to these people, which helped me to collect adequate amounts of data. During the interview, it was difficult to allocate time appropriately to different questions, as the interviewees want to speak a lot on their favorite topics. Some interviewees did not want to give correct information about their negative experiences, negative sides of social media, etc. Some interviewees tried to give very short answers for all or most of the questions. I was fully prepared to tackles these challenges effectively and collected the data that I needed.

The transcription of English language into Greek language in a strategically way was not an easy task. This process was very challenging due to the fact that it was needed a very careful attention on how to transfer exactly the same way interviewees’ words.
In addition, the case study method and semi-structured interviews allowed for investigating the research questions in-depth. The case study method ensures that the topic is not explored in only one way, but rather through a variety of lenses which allow for the multiple views in which one phenomenon can be understood (Baxter and Jack, 2008). I took lots of preparation before the interviews, which helped to overcome the difficulties that I faced during the interviews. The interviews produced a large amount of qualitative data, which was challenging to handle. I followed a systematic process to analyze data which was very useful. In result, carrying out this research has also improved my communication and interviewing skills, data analysis and writing skills.

It has been challenging to do my job and conducting this research and writing the thesis, as due to ongoing economic turmoil and crisis in Greece, each employee needs to do work for long hours with lower pay and each employee needs to do much more work than the employees of other countries (e.g. Nordic countries). This consumed lots of energy from me. Furthermore, a large number of people are jobless and people lose their jobs easily in Greece, as companies are having difficult time due to recession and it is very easy for companies to recruit new workers with lower pay. I have been worried for the threat of losing my job. I am very glad that I have learnt a lot by carrying out the research and thesis writing despite various complicated difficulties.

6.5 Recommendations for further research

This study has been conducted by using a single case study method. The research questions that were examined in this research, they could be examined by using a multiple case study method.

This study identifies that employees of companies are often lacking requisite social media skills to use them as business tools. Therefore, in-depth research is needed on what are some of the most effective ways for companies to acquire rapidly evolving Social Media skills, implement them effectively in organizations and keep the Social Media skills updated?

The adoption of Mobile devices by using Social Media are increasing rapidly around the world, which have created new opportunities for direct communication with customers, providing customer service, using of customer service chat bots, mobile multimedia advertising, brand building, etc. However, companies have failed to tap these new opportunities. Research is needed on how companies can tap these new opportunities offered by mobile social media.

Mobile Social Media allows for collection of a massive amount of data direct from the customers. Social Media analytics tools may help to analyze this data rapidly and take better decisions and actions. Research is needed on how Social Media analytics tools can be utilized effectively for the massive amount of social media data analysis.

The use of artificial intelligence in Social Media is increasing. There is a tremendous potential on this research area, thus in-depth research is also needed on this topic.

Social Media is rapidly evolving, thus future research is also necessary on Social Media, and this research can be a foundation for the future research.
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Appendices
Appendix A. The Interview questionnaire guide

Section A. Company, products and services related questions, usages of Social Media

1. How do you define Social Media \(^1\) and Social Networks \(^2\) and what are the differences between them?
2. Which Social Media and Social Networks are used in your company and why?
   a) for which business functions they are used?
   b) how they are used?
   c) which benefits are obtained from them?
   d) which drawbacks/barriers are encountered in using them?
3. What are the differences in using the current Social Media and Social Networks in your company now in contrast with seven years ago?
4. Which benefits are obtained from the economic point of view with the usage of Social Media in your company?
5. What social media your company intends to use in the future, for which business purposes and why?
6. Which are your company’s preferred Social Media and Social Networks and why?
7. What are the reasons behind for not using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) to perform a variety of business functions in your company?
8. What needs to be done so that your company can use the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media to perform a variety of business functions in your company?
9. Is the usage of Facebook and Instagram in your company a way of resource development\(^4\) or a way of increasing the risk of competition\(^3\) or both of them or none of the aforementioned in the Greek market of retail business sector and why?
10. How does your company manage the information that collects from customers through Facebook and Instagram comments? How customers are affected by the advertisements and services of your company?
11. How customers respond to the sales days regarding Facebook and Instagram? Do you think that Facebook and Instagram help in promoting the sales of your company more than other services such as emails, text messages, etc.?

Key concepts:
1. **Social Media** are computer-mediated technologies that allow the creation and sharing of information, ideas and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.
2. **Social Networks** are the means of expanding the number of one's business or social contacts of a specific group by making connections through individuals, often through social media sites.

3. **Resource Development** means making the brand name and trade mark of the company widely known; increasing the popularity of the company, its products and services; and generating economic prosperity of the business.

4. **Risk of Increased Competition** means an increasing number of companies are using mostly Social Media and Social Networks in order to promote their products and services and attract more customers. If a company does not use Social Media or use in a limited scale or ineffectively, while its competitors use Social Media and Social Networks extensively to promote their products and services and attract more customers, then the company will be at risk of competitiveness loss.

**Section B. General background regarding the case company and the interviewees**

1) Company’s background and its experiences with Social Media and Social Networks:
   - Name of the company:
   - Year of the establishment of the company:
   - Total number of employees of the company:
   - The name of the Department that is under study:
   - Total number of employees of the Department that is under study:
   - Industry in which the company is doing business:
   - Address and contact details of the company:
   - Website of the company:
   - How long has the company or the Department that is under study been using Social Media and Social Networks?

2) Individual interviewee and his/her experience with Social Media and Social Networks:
   - Name of the interviewee:
   - The gender of the interviewee:
   - Contact details of the interviewee:
   - The position/title of the interviewee:
   - Educational level of the interviewee:
   - In which way the interviewee is involved in the development and maintaining Social Media and Social Networks of the company/department and how long s/he has been involved in these activities?
   - The total work experience of the interviewee:

**Note**

If you have published materials that provide additional information with respect to my research questions, please provide me with those materials.
5.1 Appendix B. Informed Consent forms

5.1.1 B1. Informed Consent form In English language

Linnaeus University
Department of Informatics
Master Program in Information Systems

Thesis title
“Using Social Media in Retail Businesses in Greece: An Empirical Investigation”

Researcher
Mixalis Drakoularakos (md222nr@lnu.student.se)

Purpose of the Research
The purpose of the research is to explore if the usage of Social Media in Greek retail businesses leads to development of a company or increasing risk of competitiveness or both of them or none of them. Also, this study aims to report the differences in current use of Social Media in Greek retail sector than seven years ago, during the economic crisis of the country.

Research Process
Regarding the research process, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with managers of several departments of the case company in order to collect information about the use and impact of Social Media. All participants will answer to a common questionnaire guide, which will be sent at least one week before the scheduled interview. Additionally, observation method will be used in Facebook and Instagram pages of the case company in order to check out the frequency of likes and comments in every post of these sites as well as the impact of them to the enterprise.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to the Participants
This study deals with the usage of Social Media in retail businesses and specifically, focuses on retail businesses in Greece, a country with high economic instability, in order to illustrate the usefulness of Social Media from an economic perspective. Besides, this study explores the potential development of retail businesses because of Social Media use by providing empirical evidence. In fact, it deals with the growth of popularity and the economic prosperity of the retail businesses. Additionally, the study investigates the potential risk of competitiveness, which could be increased due to the fact that more and more retail companies use Social Media in order to advertise their products and attract more consumers. Of course, the development and the risk of competitiveness in retail businesses in Greece could be both happened, each of them for different reasons. Furthermore, the study presents the difference in using Social Media in Greek retail businesses seven years ago, at the start of economic crisis in the country, and the present time in order to highlight the changes in using the Facebook and Instagram sites over the years. From the participant’s perspective, all the mangers of each department of case company will comprehend the massive change of technology and this can impact both businesses and people. The participants of the research will understand how difficult is to remain competitive in an intensively competitive environment, to improve knowledge management and business performance. Also, the managers of the case company will realize the importance of using the integrated capabilities of multiple Social Media in several business functions. So, the participants of this study will obtain some benefits by accepting my request for participating in the research process.
Risk and Discomfort
The research will not present any personal information which may pose risks or cause discomfort to the participants. The names of participants will not be revealed in order to secure anonymity and confidentiality. I respect your willingness to participate, thus all the personal information both of participants and users of Facebook and Instagram pages will remain anonymous. Any recorded sessions will not be made public.

Participant’s Rights on the research
The participation is absolutely voluntary and all the participants are able to withdraw at any time without any reason of explanation. The analysis of the extracted data will be available to all participants, whenever they ask for it.

Data and Confidentiality
The data will be collected and analysed solely by the researcher and will not be shared with third parties. Also, the information gathered from Facebook and Instagram pages will be used only for the purpose of this research and will not be shared with other people.

Informed Consent

I have read all the above terms and I agree with them. Yes ☐ No ☐

I am aware of voluntary participation and I am able to withdraw at any time. Yes ☐ No ☐

I am willing to participate on this research and I allow the researcher to use the information provided for the purpose of this study. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree and allow the researcher to record our interview. Yes ☐ No ☐

Date.............................................................
Place of Interview.........................................
Participant’s Name......................................
The Researcher..........................

Participant’s Signature

..........................................

Researcher’s Signature

.............................................
5.1.2 Β2. Informed Consent form in Greek language
(Φόρμα συγκατάθεσης στην ελληνική γλώσσα)

Πανεπιστήμιο Linnaeus
Τμήμα Πληροφορικής
Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα στα Πληροφοριακά Συστήματα

Τίτλος Διπλωματικής εργασίας
"Χρήση των Κοινωνικών Μέσων Δικτύωσης στις Επιχειρήσεις Λιανικής στην Ελλάδα: Μια Εμπειρική Έρευνα"

Ερευνητής
Μιχάλης Δρακουλάκος (md222nr@lnu.student.se)

Σκοπός της έρευνας
Σκοπός της έρευνας είναι να διερευνηθεί εάν η χρήση των κοινωνικών μέσων δικτύωσης στις ελληνικές επιχειρήσεις λιανικής οδηγεί στην ανάπτυξη μιας επιχείρησης ή στην αυξανόμενο κίνδυνο ανταγωνιστικότητας ή και τα δύο ή κανένα από αυτά. Επίσης, αυτή η μελέτη στοχεύει να αναφέρει τις διαφορές στην τρέχουσα χρήση των Κοινωνικών Μέσων Δικτύωσης στην ελληνική αγορά λιανικής από ό, τι πριν από επτά χρόνια, κατά τη διάρκεια της οικονομικής κρίσης της χώρας.

Διαδικασία έρευνας
Όσον αφορά την ερευνητική διαδικασία, θα πραγματοποιηθούν ημι-δομημένες συνέντευξες με διευθυντές διαφόρων τμημάτων της εταιρείας, προκειμένου να συλλέξουν πληροφορίες σχετικά με τη χρήση και τον αντίκτυπο των κοινωνικών μέσων δικτύωσης. Όλοι οι συμμετέχοντες θα απαντήσουν σε έναν κοινό οδηγό ερωτηματολογίου, ο οποίος θα σταλεί τουλάχιστον μία εβδομάδα πριν από την προγραμματισμένη συνέντευξη. Επιπλέον, η μέθοδος παρατήρησης θα χρησιμοποιηθεί στις σελίδες Facebook και Instagram της εταιρίας για να ελέγξει τη συχνότητα των likes και σχολίων σε κάθε δημοσίευση αυτών των ιστότοπων, καθώς και την επίδρασή τους στην επιχείρηση.

Οφέλη από την έρευνα και τα οφέλη για τους συμμετέχοντες
Αυτή η μελέτη ασχολείται με τη χρήση των κοινωνικών μέσων δικτύωσης στις επιχειρήσεις λιανικής πώλησης και συγκεκριμένα εστιάζεται στις επιχειρήσεις λιανικού εμπορίου στην Ελλάδα, μια χώρα με μεγάλη οικονομική αστάθεια, προκειμένου να καταδείξει τη χρησιμότητα των κοινωνικών μέσων από οικονομική άποψη. Εκτός αυτού, η μελέτη αυτή διερευνά τη δυνητική ανάπτυξη των επιχειρήσεων λιανικής πώλησης λόγω της χρήσης των κοινωνικών μέσων με την παροχή εμπειρικών στοιχείων. Στην πραγματικότητα, ασχολείται με την αύξηση της δημοτικότητας και την οικονομική ενίσχυση των επιχειρήσεων λιανικής. Επιπλέον, η μελέτη διερευνά τον δυνητικό κίνδυνο ανταγωνιστικότητας, ο οποίος μπορεί να αυξηθεί λόγω του γεγονότος ότι όλες και περισσότερες επιχειρήσεις λιανικής πώλησης χρησιμοποιούν τα Μέσα Κοινωνικής Δικτύωσης για να διαφημίσουν τα προϊόντα τους και να προσελκύσουν περισσότερους καταναλωτές. Φυσικά, η ανάπτυξη και ο κίνδυνος ανταγωνιστικότητας στις επιχειρήσεις λιανικής πώλησης στην Ελλάδα θα μπορούσε να συμβεί και για όλους, για διαφορετικούς λόγους. Επιπλέον, η μελέτη παρουσιάζει τη διαφορά στη χρήση των Social Media στις ελληνικές επιχειρήσεις λιανικής πώλησης πριν από επτά χρόνια, στην αρχή της οικονομικής κρίσης στη χώρα και την παρούσα στιγμή για να επισημάνουμε τις διαφορές στη χρήση των Facebook και Instagram με τα χρόνια. Από την οπτική γωνία του συμμετέχοντα, όλοι οι διευθυντές κάθε τμήματος της
εταιρείας θα κατανοήσουν τη μαζική αλλαγή της τεχνολογίας και αυτό μπορεί να επηρεάσει τόσο τις επιχειρήσεις όσο και τους ανθρώπους. Οι συμμετέχοντες στην έρευνα θα καταλάβουν πόσο δύσκολο είναι να παραμείνουν ανταγωνιστικοί σε ένα έντονα ανταγωνιστικό περιβάλλον, να βελτιώσουν τη διαχείριση της γνώσης και τις επιχειρηματικές επιδόσεις. Επίσης, οι διαχειριστές της εταιρείας θα συνειδητοποιήσουν τη σημασία της χρήσης των ολοκληρωμένων δυνατοτήτων πολλών κοινωνικών μέσων σε διάφορες επιχειρηματικές λειτουργίες.

Κίνδυνοι και αμήχανια
Η έρευνα δεν θα παρουσιάσει καμία προσωπική πληροφορία που μπορεί να δημιουργήσει κινδύνους ή να προκάλεσε αμηχανία στους συμμετέχοντες. Τα στοιχεία των συμμετεχόντων δεν θα αποκαλυφθούν για να εξασφαλίσει η ανωνυμία και η εμπιστευτικότητα. Σέβομαι την προθυμία σας να συμμετάσχετε, έτσι όλες οι προσωπικές πληροφορίες τόσο των συμμετεχόντων όσο και των χρηστών των σελίδων Facebook και Instagram θα παραμείνουν ανώνυμες. Οι καταχωρημένες συνεδρίες δεν θα δημοσιοποιηθούν.

Δικαιώματα των συμμετεχόντων στην έρευνα
Η συμμετοχή είναι απολύτως εθελοντική και όλοι οι συμμετέχοντες είναι σε θέση να αποσύρουν ανά πάσα στιγμή και καινόβλητα πάσα στιγμή χωρίς κανένα λόγο εξήγησης. Η ανάλυση των εξαγόμενων δεδομένων θα είναι διαθέσιμη σε όλους τους συμμετέχοντες, όποτε το ζητήσουν.

Δεδομένα και εμπιστευτικότητα
Τα δεδομένα συλλέγονται και αναλύονται αποκλειστικά από τον ερευνητή και δεν θα μοιράζονται με τρίτους. Επίσης, οι πληροφορίες που συλλέγονται από τις σελίδες του Facebook και του Instagram θα χρησιμοποιηθούν μόνο για τους σκοπούς αυτής της έρευνας και δεν θα μοιραστούν με άλλους ανθρώπους.

Φόρμα Συγκατάθεσης

Έχω διαβάσει όλους τους παραπάνω όρους και συμφωνώ μαζί τους. Ναι Όχι

Έχω επίγνωση της εθελοντικής συμμετοχής μου και είμαι σε θέση να αποσφρηθώ ανά πάσα στιγμή. Ναι Όχι

Είμαι πρόθυμος να συμμετάσχω σε αυτή την έρευνα και επιτρέπω τον ερευνητή να χρησιμοποιήσει τις πληροφορίες που παρέχονται για το σκοπό αυτής της μελέτης. Ναι Όχι

Συμφωνώ και επιτρέπω στον ερευνητή να καταγράψει τη συνέντευξή μας. Ναι Όχι

Ημερομηνία......................................................
Τόπος Συνέντευξης.................................
Όνομα του Συμμετέχοντα..............................
Ο ερευνητής ..............................................

Υπογραφή του Συμμετέχοντος............................
Υπογραφή του Ερευνητή................................

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5.2 Appendix C. Declaration Form

Linnaeus University
Sweden

Declaration – Submission of the Thesis
This form should be included in the thesis. Before you sign please see
http://refro.lnu.se/english/what-is-plagiarism/ where you found information about
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Did you write the thesis alone or in cooperation with someone? Tick one of the boxes

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5.3 Appendix D. Observation’s screenshots

D1. Instagram’s post in 17th of July

Translation

“dpamgreece The week starts with your favourite clothes of DPAM! Discover them in all stores and our website www(dpam.gr with sales till 50%! And by choosing 5 pieces and more you gain an extra 10%!“
D2. Facebook’s post in 20th of July

Translation
“Blue is definitely the color of summer. Find your favorite clothes, shoes and accessories for vacations in blue color with sales”.
D3. Facebook’s post in 22th of July

Translation
“The game does not stop neither in sleeping, so for this reason in DPAM you can find the most beautiful pajamas and bodysuits which will hug their dreams!”
D4. Instagram’s post in 23rd of July

 múm gi 159
dpamgreece Mood of the day 🌊昺🌸 #dpam #ligopioxaroumenoi #autopouagapountapaidia

Repost from @miouprincesslovespink - Surfer mode on 🌊昺=email #wetsuit #surferstyle #mint #cute #boys #boyswillbeboys #littleman #beach #sea #sun #greece #halkidiki #dpam #dpamgreece #outandabout #summer #july2017 #vitaminsea

Δείτε το 1 σχόλιο
23 ΙΟΥΛΙΟΥ - ΔΕΙΤΕ ΤΗ ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΗ
D5. Facebook’s post in 26th of July

Translation

“Only a dress is never enough for the summer! Right? So, find your favorite with sales till 50% for girls 0-2 years old here: goo.gl/jV4p4Z and for girls 3-14 years old here: goo.gl/bsA7Xh”
D6. Facebook’s post in 27th of July

Translation

“DPAM and Safe Water Sports TOGETHER this summer in order to be happier and careless on vacations. Safe Water Sports…”
D7. Facebook’s post in 30 of July

Translation
“What a nice company on the beach from a book? You can find some suggestions for children books which will make our little friends a bit happier this summer!”