



# Tell Your Story Today!

By Jack Rabah



For thousands of years, humans have used narrative and stories to communicate. From people in the streets to prophets, stories were one of the most effective ways religion was preached to the masses. As I look back, I find that the most influential people in my life are all good storytellers. No matter what the story is about, good stories—and the people who tell them—stick with you for a lifetime. From my early childhood days I enjoyed stories: stories I heard, stories I read, and stories that took place around me. Little did I know that this simple yet completely human means of communications would dominate media thirty years later.

Storytelling is a natural way to communicate and engage the public, which is why corporations around the world—with varying degrees of success—have been attempting brand storytelling. Corporations that manage to connect stories with their brand's core values are reaping the biggest rewards.

Given these new revelations in the world of marketing and communications, social media marketing provides a practical and cost-effective solution. Social media marketing is taking centre stage as corporations hire brand evangelists to tell their story rather than marketers to sell their products or services.

Social media provides the best tools for storytelling including social interaction on Facebook, microblogs on Twitter, photo stories on Instagram, videos on YouTube, and virtual reality experiences. There are so many social media tools out there that we can put to our use as long as our target audience is using them. Take a look at the following table for a small subset of the social media tools out there and their classifications:

## Social Media Classification

Classification	Sample Sites
Social Networking	Facebook, Google +
Publishing	WordPress, Blogger
Photo Sharing	Flickr, Instagram, Pinster
Audio	SoundCloud, iTunes
Video	YouTube, Keek, Vimeo, Google Video
Microblogging	Twitter
Livecasting	Live365
Virtual Worlds	Second Life
Gaming	EverQuest
Productivity Applications	Google Drive, Office 365, SurveyMonkey, zoho
Aggregators	Digg, Reddit
RSS	Google FeedBurner, RSS 2.0
Search	Google, bing, Yahoo!
Mobile	BBM, WhatsApp, Tango, SMS, iMessage
Interpersonal	Skype, FaceTime
Check-In (Marking)	Foursquare

Source: *The Social Media Bible* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) by Lon Safko

Firms that are following a digital business model approach social media marketing strategically in contrast to other firms that are still using social media as an alternative for offline soft marketing. A key issue which is still unclear to many is how to measure the success and the return on investment (ROI) for their social media marketing efforts. Many objective and subjective methods are being put to use starting with counting “likes” and all the way to tracking real leads and/or



These days, start-ups, as well as big corporations are talking about social media marketing. But with hundreds of social media tools out there, how can we utilize them in a winning social media marketing strategy? Recent developments worldwide suggest that storytelling is the glue that binds new and old media vehicles under a single unifying umbrella with social media marketing at its core.

actual sales generated. However, this part of social media marketing still needs much more development and research.

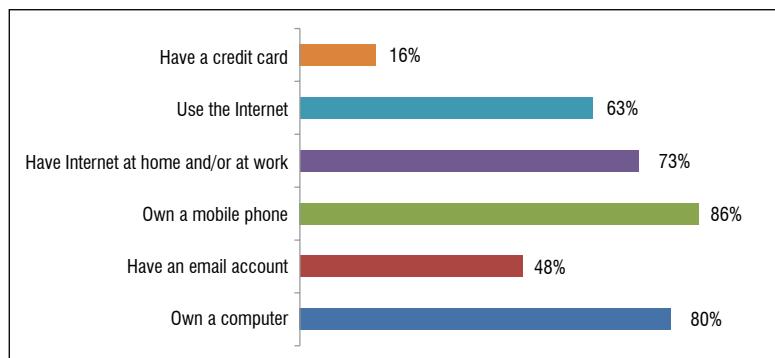
### A Local Perspective

When considering the applicability of social media for marketing or even storytelling as a branding approach in our local Palestinian context, a number of questions come up: How much is the local consumer ready for this new era? What about the businesses? What about the infrastructure?

I would like to share some figures below from a recent telephone survey I conducted of 616 Palestinians, age 18 and above, from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem. I hope it will shed some light on this issue.

In recent years, the basic telecommunications infrastructure has significantly improved in Palestine, and this is noticeable from the results of the survey (see Figure 1). While 86% own a mobile phone, 73% have Internet at home or work, and about 63% use the Internet. On the other hand, we notice that there is still some more development needed to improve e-commerce in Palestine as only 16% of respondents have credit cards.

**Figure 1: Access to telecommunications infrastructure**

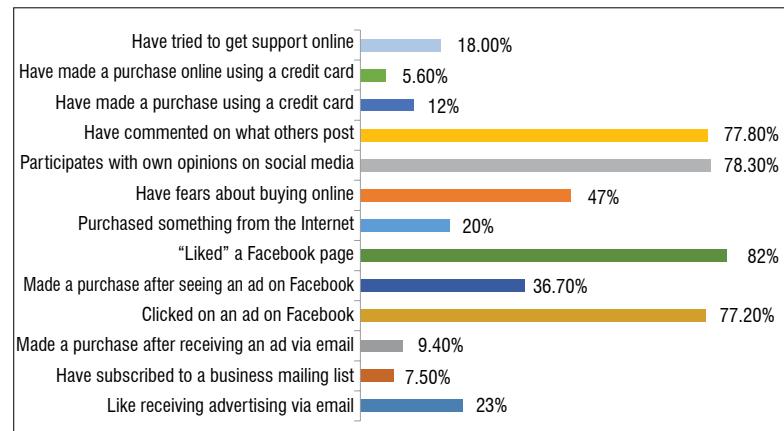


Furthermore, Figure 2 shows that while Palestinian consumers like to engage in online conversations and comment on others' posts (78%), most have fears about purchasing online (47%), and only 5% have ever purchased anything online using a credit card.

As for Palestinians' perceptions of social media marketing, we notice that Facebook advertising could be the most effective social media marketing tool in Palestine, with 77% who claim to click on advertisements on Facebook. Furthermore, about half of those who click actually bought a good or service after seeing its ad on Facebook, compared to only 9% who bought a good or service after receiving advertising via email.

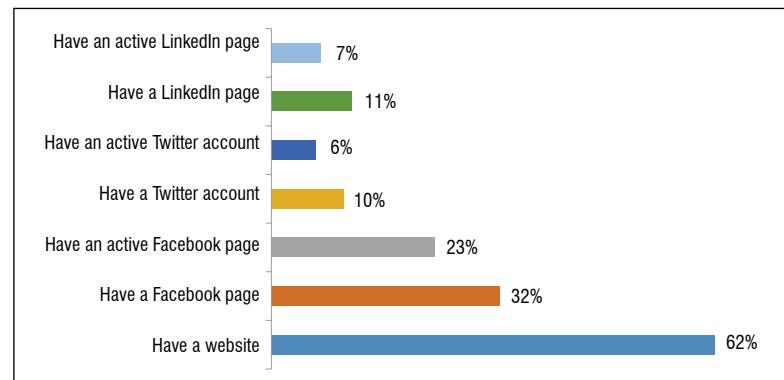
With 20% having already purchased something online, it is an encouraging indicator that there will be a stronger future for e-commerce and social media marketing in Palestine.

**Figure 2: Profiling the Palestinian Consumer**



As for local businesses, an extensive online study of around 300 local businesses indicates that about 62% have a website, although most need updating and activation with fresh content and tools. As for social media tools, companies with an active Facebook page (23%) constitute a small percentage of the companies investigated. In addition, other social media tools are used even less, with active Twitter accounts at 6% and active LinkedIn pages at 7% (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Palestinian Private Sector Usage of Social Media Tools**



As for the type of content local businesses are publishing on social media, we notice that it is an assortment ranging from trivia and contests to promotions and offers. There are limited serious attempts to engage audience through a well-



became the storyteller of Heritage Week, announcing the program, driving the bus to bring our Palestinian brothers from Golan, and calling upon our youth to return from abroad and join in preserving our heritage and developing rural Palestine. Amti Tooteh reminds us of the importance of our heritage, of our traditional costumes, and of our beautiful traditional songs.

On a personal level, I have been experimenting with storytelling as a means of sharing bits of our Palestinian heritage and culture. I have been writing a number of short pieces and publishing them on my personal blog. Visit the blog if you want to know why one of the lions in Al Manara Square is wearing a watch, or why—if you can get to Jerusalem—you should visit the Dar Al Tifel Palestinian Heritage Museum.

A final note of encouragement: there is great potential for storytelling in Palestine and in the Arab world in general. For centuries, the Arabs have been the sources of legends, fables, and tales of the adventures of kings and warriors. For generations, the tradition of oral storytelling was a powerful medium for narrating the drama inherent in these tales. Finally, the storyteller who represented the collective genius and fantasies of his people would, with his way with words, breathed life into the heroes of history, bringing a piece of the past to life for his avid listeners. So, what are you waiting for? Start telling the story of your brand today!

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planned social media strategy. As for storytelling, there is definitely a chance to make a unique mark in this area, as it is quite underdeveloped.

On a professional level, I have been toying around with storytelling for some time now. One of the accomplishments I am proud of is the creation of the Amti Tooteh character, who as of last year became the voice of the Birzeit Heritage Week. Amti Tooteh



A special thanks to the Gazan photographer and artist Shareef Sarhan who provided almost all the images of Gaza in this issue. Throughout the shelling and very difficult conditions, not only was Shareef a professional in obliging to every request we had, but he was also a mannered and patient gentleman.