Marketing Lebanese Identity through People’s Uprising: Promoting Ethnocentrism and Lebanese Products and Services

For centuries, Lebanon has been affected by a series of colonizations, foreign settlements, illegitimate occupations, oppressions, lack of freedom, internal and external conflicts and a deteriorating economic situation that led to an overwhelming brain drain. Those who departed have excelled and left a very positive impact in various economic, medical, political and social sectors in their countries of immigration. Those who stayed were very eager to leave Lebanon looking for new opportunities outside their country. Suddenly, in an unprecedented move, Lebanese residing in Lebanon and those who have immigrated are united in a revolution, the October 17, 2019 Revolution, not along sectarian affiliation, which took hold of the country’s identity for many years, but under a united goal to remove an inefficient, incompetent and corrupted government. This research work consists of a series of semi-structured interviews focusing on how various individuals view their identity. The sample consists of both Lebanese individuals who immigrated during the last ten years and others still residing in Lebanon. The aim of the research is to study the attitude of Lebanese people towards their identity. A world known Lebanese author referred to this ambiguity by “You have your Lebanon and I have my Lebanon.” (Gibran, 1933). However, because of the recent revolution, the researchers decided to analyze the attitude of the Lebanese people towards their identity before/during/and after the October 17, 2019 Revolution. The researchers’ objective is to understand this complex social phenomenon and develop a model to market the Lebanese identity in order to achieve a brain drain reversal hoping to boost the loyalty of the scattered diaspora to their homeland so that they can contribute towards the economic stability, intellectual and cultural revival and reconstruction of Lebanon.

Keywords: Marketing Lebanese Identity and Products, Brain drain

Introduction

Living in a country geographically located in the Middle East, but quite different from its surrounding Arab neighbors,

In a country invaded by non-locals such as Syrians, Palestinians, Egyptians, Iraqi who flew the civil wars in their countries and settled there,
In a country where most of the working force is Ethiopian, Sri Lanky, Bengali, Syrian, Kurd, Turk, Syrian,
In a country where the local language is rarely spoken and/or is often mixed with French and/or English,
In a country devastated by a series of consecutive wars,
In a country where corruption is the rule,
In a country where government institutions are inefficient,
In a country where individuals are assessed according to the religion they were born with,
In a country suffering from severe economic crisis and high unemployment rate,
In a country where a large number of young educated citizens have left,
In a country where those who are still there are eager to leave,
In a country where the majority of the citizens have double nationalities…,
... …,

How can we market the Lebanese identity so as Lebanese citizens worldwide feel proud and join hands in order to rebuild Lebanon’s infrastructure and economy? Miracles may happen.

This research work will investigate how Lebanese citizens view their identity. The researchers’ objective is to develop a framework helping to stop or eventually reverse the brain drain. This can be achieved through marketing the Lebanese identity by enhancing the loyalty of local citizens and the scattered diaspora to their home country so that they can contribute to the economic, intellectual and cultural reconstruction of Lebanon.

**Literature Review**

“Know thyself!” a key topic in Socrates’ principles in psychopathology, has been widely analyzed in various articles (Moore, 2014) (Krueger and al., 2011) (Karpas, 1915).

Who am I? What is my Identity?

“Identity” is a widely used term that has different meanings to different people. “Identity” refers sometimes to a sense of integration of the self, in which different aspects come together in a unified whole. (Deaux, 2001).

“Identity” refers to the self-concept, the image people have of themselves, or the sense of who they are. (Champniss et al., 2015). “Identity” refers also to the patriotic belonging or level of attachment to political or religious sects (Gibran, 1933; Maalouf, 2011).

Another aspect of identity is Social identity which refers to the part of an individual’s self-concept derived from his/her knowledge of his/her membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Brewer, 2001, Jenkins, 2014).

Similarly, Ethnic identity changes with the environment, as in the case of immigration. People will often establish connections with neighborhoods, organizations, stores and products in the new country that reflect and promote their ethnic identity of origin. (Deaux, 2001). When a person relocates from one place to another for education, career or the like, he/she starts to develop social supports in the new location to replace those supports that are no longer part of his/her immediate environment. This process of grounding an identity in a new social environment has been termed “remooring” (Deaux, 2001).
In addition, the linguistic practices are reflected in the individual and collective identities and inevitably shaped by the socio-political and cultural situation of the region people are living. (Diez, 2021). In her study, Diez analyzed recent linguistic developments and how Lebanese perceive that speaking Arabic influences their identity and ethnic belonging. (Diez, 2021).

Different identities may lead to identity confusion (Munley and al., 1975) and “identity crisis” (Erikson, 1981). According to the Lebanese author Amin Maalouf, each individual’s identity is made up of a number of elements not restricted to the particular identity set down in the official records. “I haven’t got several identities: I’ve got just one, made up of many components combined together in a mixture that is unique to every individual” (Maalouf, 2000). Maalouf, who resided in Lebanon and in France, was often asked whether he felt “more French” or “more Lebanese”. His answer was consistently the same “Both”. That is what he really feels. He pursued “I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself” (Maalouf, 2000). According to Maalouf, many young adults whose roots are in a culture but who lived in another felt the same dilemma (Maalouf, 2000) which is the case of many Lebanese. Their vision of themselves and their identity differs as some are still living in Lebanon, whereas many are well settled in foreign countries, while others are coming back to live in Lebanon after having spent years abroad.

As Lebanon has been affected by series of colonization, foreign settlements, illegitimate occupations, internal and external conflicts, people have been living in a VUCA world - Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous- (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014). The resulting oppressions and lack of freedom led to a lot of exiles and an overwhelming brain drain. The brain drain continued due to the devastating civil war and the deteriorating economic situation in the country (Kronfol, 1987, Dibeh and al, 2017, Dibeh and al, 2018).

Many Lebanese authors referred to this brain drain. Ameen Rihani (1921), took a liberal attitude by adopting the idea of the "Citizen of the World": "We are not of the East or the West; No boundaries exist in our breast: We are free" (Rihani, 1921). However, can the Lebanese -whether residing in Lebanon or abroad- reach that level of freedom of thought? Gibran Khalil Gibran, who lived the oppression and lack of liberty of expression, wrote about the development of the Arab identity as he himself had controversy feelings. Gibran’s words ring true today as the nation is subdivided and the country struggles with an identity shaped by history, colonization, internal and external wars, and a geographic location in a rough neighborhood. (Abu-Fadil, 2010, Dammarell, 1992).

Gibran referred to the political and sectorial conflicts that are oppressing citizens, when he sorrowfully wrote:

Pity the nation that is full of beliefs and empty of religion.
Pity the nation divided into fragments, each fragment deeming itself a nation.
Pity the nation that wears a cloth it does not weave, eats a bread it does not harvest, and drinks a wine that flows not from its own wine-press... (Gibran, 1933).

As if Gibran was referring to today’s purchase behavior of Lebanese. Consumers are concerned about country of origin of products they buy (Piron, 2000, Kalicharan, 2014, Krupka, 2018, Zbib, 2012, Zbib, 2010). However, for Lebanese who are still residing in Lebanon, the unstable and oscillating sense of belonging resulted in them being less patriotic and thus less willing to buy specialty products that are “Made in Lebanon” (Ahmed et al., 2012), thus no ethnocentric. This is observed mainly in young generations who are highly involved in their families’ purchase decisions (Kwai-Choi Lee, 2000).

According to Shiffman and Wisenblit (2019), ethnocentrism is the consumer’s willingness to buy or not buy foreign-made products. Consumers who are “high” in ethnocentrism are not willing to purchase foreign-made products. They even feel it is inappropriate or wrong to do so (Shiffman and Wisenblit, 2019). Ethnocentric consumers avoid purchasing foreign made products, tend to limit their purchase to locally made, domestic products due to affective and normative considerations. They are willing to try locally made products, repeat purchases and spread positive word-of-mouth about it (Sharma, 2015; Farah and Mehdi, 2021; Watson, 2000, De Dreu, 2011, Ziemnowiez, 2007). According to Spillan et al. (2007, p. 40), ethnocentrism can be defined as “a means of differentiating consumer groups who prefer domestic goods over imported goods.” Although some ethnocentric groups might exhibit purchasing bias towards their local products, they might still feel constrained to buy foreign products due to various ethnocentric impediments (Farah and Mehdi, 2021).

Shimp and Sharma (1987) proposed a more consumer-oriented definition of ethnocentrism, describing it as the belief that purchasing imported products is morally wrong due to the general unpatriotic nature of that activity as well as its negative effect on domestic economy and employment. Highly ethnocentric consumers not only refuse to purchase foreign-made products, but also reprimand others for engaging in such unethical purchasing behaviors (Shimp and Sharma, 1987, Shankarmahesh, 2006).

It is worth noting that Lebanese consumers are highly influenced by political events as well as resolutions taken by local and foreign governments. As a result, they often avoid buying and even boycott products made in that specific foreign country (Mrad, and al, 2014; Klein and al, 2002). Many Lebanese consumers have boycotted American products (Farah, 2011) or European products as their respective governments have negatively affected human rights or some political ideologies (Farah, 2011). By boycotting, consumers take a stand and reflect their anger towards a product or a country (Jill and al., 2002). They consider boycotting as a way to maintain or enhance self-esteem and protect their identity (Brewer and Brown, 1998; Pittman, 1998; Farah, 2011).

The researchers agreed that many of Gibran’s quotations are still valid today as they were reflected in major slogans during the recent people’s uprise.
known as “October 17, 2019 Revolution”. As a result of an unbearable oppression, corruption and bad economic situation, topped by a series of intended forest fires and an additional unjustified increase in taxes, Lebanese from different political and religious affiliations joined their voices to express their revolt against all government institutions and their anger towards prevailing corruption (L’Orient- Le Jour, 2019, Youssef, 2020). They are requesting drastic changes in the public sector and reversing the current corrupted government (El Hokayem, 2019). For the first time since ages, Lebanese are united and holding only the Lebanese flag. They succeeded in creating a Human Chain from North to South of Lebanon, holding the Lebanese flag and chanting the National Anthem (An-Nahar, 2019). They even passed one Lebanese pound along this Human Chain to show unity and support of the Lebanese currency (An-Nahar, 2019). Lebanese immigrants or Lebanese residing abroad have also gathered in their place of residency to express their anger, as the corrupted politicians are the main reason of their leaving their home country and their families. For many this is their “Last Chance.”(Schaar, 2019).

It is worth noting that most of the Lebanese who are revolting are young adults and university graduates who are unable to ensure long term jobs and plan a secure career path. They are frustrated, demotivated, and offended as less qualified people are acquiring top jobs only because they are affiliated to a specific political party or they have good connections known as “vitamin W” called in Arabic “wasta” (Schaar, 2019)

Upon the approval of most university presidents (Khuri and Daccache, 2019), faculty members and students are organizing frequent protest campaigns to express their anger against the current situation. As roads, shops, schools and universities are closed by protestors, some students are inquiring about when classes will resume. In his reply, a university faculty member posted the following message on social media: “To all my students: If you come to class instead of protesting to save your country and your future... Then I know I failed to teach you anything of real importance” (Abdulnur, 2019).

However, eighteen months after the October 17, 2019 Revolution, the future does not look bright due to a political paralysis and an alarming economic crisis (Fisk, 2019, Mizrahi and al., 2020, Youssef, 2020); a year marked by a fourfold crisis in Lebanon: economic, political, healthcare, and the port explosion. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic, has worsened the country’s economic difficulties. After the revolution, the economic crisis, aggravated by the country’s political paralysis, corruption, and the Syrian refugee problem, has worsened even further (Fisk, 2019). The calls for political reform and improving economic situation and standards of living have not been answered yet. (Mizrahi and al., 2020).

This research work will focus mainly on how Lebanese individuals define their identity and their loyalty to their country, and explain more how we can rebuild the identification after it is lost.
Methodology and Limitations

This research work consists of a series of semi-structured interviews focusing on how various generations view their identity. The researchers interviewed 5 Lebanese still residing in Lebanon and 20 Lebanese who left the country 10 years ago or more looking for better job opportunities and living conditions elsewhere and are residing in different countries. Graduate students, working adults and retired elderlies were considered. The sample consists of a diversified group in terms of gender, education, religious affiliation, income level and occupation.

The countries of current residency were selected based on their respective culture, education, job opportunities and presence of Lebanese in the area. The sample is made of Lebanese who immigrated 10 years ago to the United States of America (US), Canada (C), Europe (E), the United Arab Emirates (A), and those who stayed in Lebanon (L).

The interviewees are referred to by the country they are currently residing in and by their age.

| Six Lebanese people who 10 years ago have immigrated to the United States of America | US18 US25 US30 US40 US50 US64 |
| Six Lebanese people who 10 years ago have immigrated to Canada | C18 C25 C30 C40 C50 C64 |
| Six Lebanese people who 10 years ago have immigrated to Europe | E18 E25 E30 E40 E50 E64 |
| Six Lebanese people who 10 years ago have left for the United Arab Emirates | A18 A25 A30 A40 A50 A64 |
| Six Lebanese people who are still in Lebanon | L18 L25 L30 L40 L50 L64 |

The researchers have used primary data obtained from interviews (online and through phone calls) as well as private written messages, online feedback and posts on social media supplemented with secondary data from local and foreign newsprints and TV reports. The spreading of the Corona virus has limited face-to-face exposure. This allowed the interviewee to feel more at ease, deliberately giving their true opinion without any restriction or embarrassment caused by being face-to-face with the interviewer. However, the researchers were not able to assess the interviewee’s facial and physical expressions, gestures and true feelings.

As diverse events and new developments are rapidly and simultaneously occurring, the researchers decided to divide the period studied into three parts (before the October 17, 2019 Revolution, During the Revolution, and Eighteen month after the Revolution) as the interviewees’ responses might be quite different.

To be ethical, a research project needs to be designed to create valid and trustworthy outcomes if it is to be believed to pursue the truth (Busher, 2002). A test of trustworthiness was prepared (Table 2). It is important to note that both researchers are Lebanese citizens and have lived all their lives in Lebanon.
and were present there before/ during and after the October 17, 2019 Revolution.

Research Findings and Analysis
Before the October 17, 2019 Revolution

When asked about the reason that made them emigrate from Lebanon

Three respondents mentioned the civil war:

“Escaping the civil war” US50, E50, C50

Another one referred to the political struggle:

“My brother was killed during fights between politically affiliated groups.” C40

A 50 years old interviewee said:

“I left Lebanon because I was living on the war front line/ battlefield/ demarcation line. My house was completely demolished. We were all terrified.” C50

Many young interviewees left to pursue their education. One even explained:

“I went to the US to get a PhD degree intending to go back home, work there and serve my country. However, the unstable political situation and the lack of opportunities a successful career path made me change my plans. It is a pity. I stayed in the US. I do not intend to go back to Lebanon” US40

Others reported that they left the country looking for jobs:

“Stable job opportunities and long-term career plans” C30, A25, A30, A64

Many interviewees from different age groups referred to corruption and lack of ethics.

“I cannot stand lack of moral values. I left Lebanon to escape unfairness, increased corruption” E40, E25, A40, US40

“I want to be appreciated for what I am, what I can do and not which political party I belong to or which religion I was born in. I am looking for an environment where human rights are respected, where equal opportunities are opened for candidates who have the skills and are willing to succeed on their own” C40, US25 US18, US30 US64, C25, C50, E25, E50, A30, A50

This search for respect is highly felt by four interviewees who are still living in Lebanon L18, L25, L30, L40. One of them reported:
“I will give up everything to get another nationality as I do not want to stand at the doors of embassies begging for any visa. A decent nationality will open doors for decent long-term job opportunities and give my kids a decent life.” L30

As mentioned in the literature review, the civil war, political conflicts and corruption were the main causes of emigration as people were looking for better education and job opportunities to secure a decent living (Gibran, 1933, Shaar, 2019).

When asked about how they feel towards the country they are living in today
A young Lebanese employee reported:

“I took two days from my annual leave to join my compatriots in Toulouse in order to represent Lebanon at “Forum of Languages” event. We were all proud to market our culture wearing traditional cloth, dancing and offering Lebanese food.” E25

Some interviewees expressed their feelings:

“I am struggling because of discrimination. Form the first moments, my colleagues stepped back as my name revealed my ethnic belongings which is associated with terrorism in Western Societies. Until now, I do not feel I belong” US25

“On my first day on a new job, my co-workers asked me: “Why did they hire you instead of hiring a compatriot?” So how do you want me to feel?” E30

“I rented an apartment. I refused to buy one because I still feel I am a stranger and I do not belong to the culture. I will definitely retire in my village back home” E40

Three young students reported different experiences. The first one said:

“I feel neglected. My classmates are reluctant to involve me in their group activities because of my accent. As soon as I will get my degree, I will search for job opportunities in Lebanon or in the Arab world” US18

The second one explained:

“I was enrolled in a top American elementary school in Lebanon. I speak English very fluently with an American accent. This is why, when I moved to the US to pursue my academic path, I was easily accepted by my classmates. I am joining them in various school and sport activities. However I feel very nostalgic when festivals or concerts are featuring key Lebanese singers” A18

The third one provided more details:

“When in Lebanon, I was exempted from Arabic classes as I had a foreign passport. I was reluctant to speak Arabic just as most of the young generation in Lebanon. As soon as I arrived to the US to join the university, I felt homesick and started learning Arabic. I was eager to finish my studies, return home, settle there
and marry a Lebanese girl. I have currently earned a high position in an American company. I am happily married to an American lady, father of three kids who only speak English. I am reluctant to visit Lebanon” US50

As mentioned in the literature review (Maalouf, 2000), some Lebanese had a strong nostalgia towards their homeland as they did not feel they belong to the country they have emigrated to (Munley and al., 1975). Some felt discriminated and neglected, two felt nostalgic whereas only one was able to integrate from the beginning (Diez, 2021) and another one was able to integrate at a later stage.

When asked about their current situation and future and retirement plans:
A Lebanese residing in Lebanon complained:
“I wish I was never born in Lebanon. What’s the use of living in a “beautiful” country, holding degrees and being unable to find a job or to raise a family?” L30

A student residing in Lebanon said:
“I can’t wait to get enrolled in a university in North America. I will study and start my professional career there”. L18

One emigrant who visited Lebanon explained:
“I have worked hard, made a lot of money. I was planning to launch a touristic project in my village in Lebanon. I started applying for the legal documents and permits. It turned out that each concerned party wanted his own part of the project!!! I was choked by the level of corruption. I said “good bye”, picked up my stuff and returned to Canada. It is a pity!” C64

As mentioned in the literature review (Brewer, 2001), Lebanese people have faced difficulties when they first immigrated to another country because of the different values over there. However, they are not planning to retire in Lebanon.

When asked about country of origin of products they buy:
Only the Lebanese residing abroad feel nostalgic as they search and purchase products carrying the label “Made in Lebanon”.
One interviewee expressed himself:
“I always buy expensive imported well-known foreign brands and never anything labeled “Made in Lebanon” as my friends will make fun of me in public. I am proud to show my friends that my shirt is “Made in France”, my boots are “Made in Italy”. I hang out around Starbucks and prefer to eat sushi. I do not purchase Lebanese products as I prefer foreign brands”. L18

An interviewee explained:
“Lebanese products are expensive in the local market as compared to some imported ones from Syria, Turkey and China as the cost of production in Lebanon is high and manufacturers do not benefit from any government fund. In my opinion, the government should support Lebanese producers, protect Lebanese start-up businesses by providing them with loans, decreasing production costs (electricity, labor, taxes...) and imposing high tariffs on imported goods. By doing so, they will boost the economy, increase local production and create job opportunities.” E40

A Lebanese emigrant said:

“When I arrived to the US, I googled Lebanese restaurants and drove one hour to reach that tiny Lebanese grocery store to buy Lebanese made sweets and Hommos proudly made in Lebanon. I was so happy to find that store and I immediately advised my friends to go there. We enjoy meeting there every weekend.” US30

As mentioned in the literature review (Zbib, 2010, Ahmed et al, 2012, Farah and Mehdi, 2021), Lebanese residing in Lebanon are reluctant to buy Lebanese products whereas those who have emigrated feel nostalgic. They look for products labelled “Made in Lebanon” especially food and wine.

When asked about their identity:

Most of the Lebanese residing in the Arab countries or elsewhere tried to get a foreign passport. Only one respondent who is carrying a foreign passport identified himself as Lebanese.

“I am Lebanese, and going back to Lebanon” E50

All the other respondents identified themselves according to the foreign passport they hold:

“When I got my American passport, I thanked God for this blessing. Yes, I am an American” US40

“I am French” E25

“I am Canadian and proud to be” C18

“I refuse to be tagged as “The Lebanese” student” US18

“I feel I am Lebanese, but my kids do not feel the same” US64, E64, C64

Some of the typical comments were:

“I am a mixture of Arab culture, American education and French training” C30

“I wish I was French or even Sri Lanky” L30

“I am trying my best to avoid being Lebanese” L50

“I am an intellectually and culturally emigrant in my own country” L40

An interviewee explained more details:
“When the war was fierce in Lebanon, my parents decided to move to the USA where I pursued my education. I started my career with an American multinational company. Few years later, I was transferred “temporarily” to the Arab Emirates because I speak Arabic. I stayed there around 30 years. Meanwhile I purchased a villa in Dubai, a house in the USA, and an apartment in the Lebanese mountains. Here I am lost: where do I belong? Where will I retire? I want my kids to love Lebanon but do they have any link to the country I was raised in?” A64

As mentioned in the literature review by Maalouf, (2011), Gibran, (1933), Rihani, (1921), and others, Lebanese people are confused about their identity. Emigrants are in a dilemma. They cannot identify themselves neither as Lebanese nor as citizens of the country they have emigrated to.

**During the October 17, 2019 Revolution**

When asked about the reason that will make them come back to Lebanon:

Five respondents reflected they will go back to stay with their family, enjoy the peaceful village life and the food if they find:

“Safety, stability and no corruption” US40, E30, C50, US64, E50

One interviewee was more specific in his reply:

“I will go back when Lebanon will be free from religious discrimination” US40

Some more nostalgic respondents expressed their feelings:

“In Lebanon, I feel I belong. I cherish the comfort of being among my parents, my relatives, my neighbors and my friends” C50, E50, US64

“The smell of the hot bread and freshly picked fruits. I will go back to enjoy waking up early to watch the sunrise in my quiet village” US40, E30

As mentioned in the literature review (Gibran, 1933, Maalouf, 2011, Kronfol, 1987, Dibeh and al, 2018)., emigrants have escaped because of war, corruption and discrimination.

When asked about how they would feel about the country they are living in today

“I enjoy every second with my family here in Canada. I feel free, happy and relaxed. I am worried about the unstable situation back home” C30, C40

A respondent explained how his children are confused:

“My kids are confused. We are living in the UAE, they have learned French at school, they speak Asian languages with the helpers at home, and they watch TV
A series in English. So when in Lebanon, they can hardly say few words of Arabic” A40

Some respondents are optimistic about the future on Lebanon:

“This revolution is very promising. We are expecting a lot of positive changes in Lebanon. The future of Lebanon looks brighter” E40, US30, E25, C30

A respondent added:

“I count the days to go back to Lebanon to join my friends in the “October Revolution”. We all need to show our anger to the current politicians” US30.

An interviewee has already made plans:

“In the past, I was reluctant to own property in Lebanon. Now, I am in the process of building a villa on a piece of land I have inherited from my father” A50

As mentioned in the literature review (An-Nahar, 2019), Lebanese emigrants are supporting the revolution, looking for a better Lebanon where they can go back to their roots.

When asked about their current situation and future and retirement plans:

A young student explains:

“This is the first time I have hopes in Lebanon. We have always been followers: following this party or this religious leader. Now, for the first time we are leaders. We feel we are free and proud to be Lebanese” L18

A young employee expressed his hopes:

“We have high hopes of a new Lebanon free of corruption. We will soon find decent long-term jobs opportunities. We will be selected based on our capabilities not on our connections, not on “Wasta” L30

Another interviewee expressed his feelings:

“To tell you the truth, I never thought of going back to Lebanon. But now with this patriotic movement I will consider retiring there” E30

One interviewee complained:

“I am stuck. I feel imprisoned as I do not have a foreign passport. My only retirement option is staying in Lebanon” L50

A second one added:

“I will play it safe. My job does not require full time physical presence. I have decided to keep my job in Lebanon but will travel as often as needed.” C40
Two others shared their opinion:

“Although we have high hopes from this revolution and the power of the people, however I still doubt the results as history repeats itself. At many instances, Lebanese have revolted against their rulers without reaching any positive amendment. I do not trust Lebanese politicians. No, I will not go back to Lebanon.”US64, C30

Two interviewees added:

“I would love to retire in Lebanon. However, my kids were born and raised in Canada. They will establish themselves in Canada. I need to retire next to them” C50

“I regret that I did not give my kids the opportunity to learn Arabic and visit Lebanon more often. They would have adapted better to our Lebanese environment” US50

As mentioned in the literature review, throughout the years, Lebanon went into a series of troubles, internal and external conflicts (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014, Kronfol, 1987, Dibeh and al, 2017, Dibeh and al, 2018). Even during the revolution, some respondents are not confident about the future of Lebanon, while others are still believing in a better future for the country.

When asked about country of origin of products they buy:

A respondent residing in Lebanon stressed:

“As I am highly excited about the revolution and making major changes in order to stop corruption, I will definitely buy Lebanese products, pay in Lebanese pounds and support the economy” L18

A middle aged residing out of Lebanon added:

“As I feel very patriotic now, I will invest in Lebanon and I will buy Lebanese products when possible” E 40

An interviewee had put some requirements:

“I will buy Lebanese products if there is serious quality control. I am wondering how Lebanese authorities will overcome counterfeit and corruption” C30

A respondent explained:

“I still do not trust. I will keep on buying local fruits and vegetables but for cloth and gifts I will still go for foreign brands” L40

As mentioned in the literature review (El Hokayem, 2019, Khuri and Daccache, 2019, Abdulnur, 2019), the revolution has awakened some patriotic and ethnocentric feelings among Lebanese whether residing in Lebanon or abroad. They are willing to support Lebanese products.
When asked about their identity:

Most of the interviewee have gained pride and confidence in identifying themselves as Lebanese.

Many young respondents immediately replied:

“I am Lebanese” C30, L18, E18, L30

Some answers were very similar:

“I am proud to be Lebanese” A30, E30, E50

“I am Lebanese, and going back to Lebanon. I want to raise my kids according to our social and cultural norms.” A50

An interviewee expressed his hopes:

“This revolution has reversed our vision of the future of Lebanon. We see new opportunities as we could identify ourselves better with the Lebanese system. We have high hopes in a better future.” E40

A respondent expressed his feelings:

“We immigrated to see the world. But Lebanon is the world “US50

As mentioned in the literature review (An-Nahar, 2019, Khuri and Daccache, 2019, Abdulnur, 2019), the revolution has awaken some patriotic feelings among Lebanese whether they are residing in Lebanon or abroad.

Eighteen month after the October 17, 2019 Revolution

Lebanese residents and emigrants had high hopes that the political, social and economic situation in Lebanon will improve but they were highly disappointed.

When asked about what will make them stay or leave Lebanon 

A typical comment after the revolution was:

“Nothing has been done. On the contrary, people in government and in power are turning a deaf ear to the revolutionists. Police officers and army soldiers have received orders to fight the revolutionists and prohibit them from holding any activity (even the most peaceful ones). We are aggressively attacked and humiliated. We are extremely disappointed, vexed, frustrated and even disgusted. Many of my friends are turning their back to their home country and running to various embassies to get a way out.” L30

An interviewee sadly said:

“It is the end of Lebanon. We have tried but no results. Who will stay now? Only the corrupted leaders. Let them enjoy what they have destroyed” L40
Another one still residing in Lebanon added:

“I am so vexed and disappointed. People in power are not feeling what we are going through. Even worst, they do not care. They are still leading their normal life”. L50

A young immigrant explained:

“My fellow army soldiers feel with us as they are suffering from the same difficulties we are facing. However, they have received orders to threaten and beat us. Poor soldiers. Their kids are away just like us. They are fighting against a cause they are suffering from!!” E25

An interviewee mentioned his crying brother:

“My brother is a soldier. He received orders to confront the revolutionists. It was a very difficult dilemma. His heart was with the revolution, but his duties ordered him to fight it. He started crying as he was beating one of the revolutionists.” L18

A Lebanese pharmacist mentioned problems that have emerged:

“We are running out of medications and medical equipment as companies are not able to import given the banks restrictions on transfer of money. Hospitals and patients are threatened. We are suffering while our politicians are careless and enjoying life. What a disaster!!” L40

A retired resident expressed his feelings:

“We had high hopes. I have invested all my savings on my kids’ education. They are frustrated as they are desperately searching for any secured long-term decent job in this corrupted environment. They are willing to take any job in any country that will grant them a visa.” L64

As mentioned in the literature review (Mizrahi and al., 2020, Youssef, 2020), the deteriorating situation in Lebanon prevailed after the Revolution, leaving people in despair and frustration.

When asked about what will make them come back if they leave Lebanon

A young adult, expressed his anger towards the political leaders:

“With the corrupted leaders. No way I will come back. They do not care. Then why should they care? They have accumulated- from our own money- a very big wealth, sufficient for them, their children and grandchildren...They have transferred all their money abroad. They can travel wherever they want, whenever they want?” E25

A Lebanese entrepreneur who is well-established in the United States explained:
“History repeats itself in Lebanon. Series of wars, civil hostilities, revolutions and corrupted leaders. My parents witnessed that, I did witness that why should my children witness that too? I am leaving now without any regret” US50

As mentioned in the literature review (Mizrahi and al., 2020, Youssef, 2020), the calls of the people for reform and change in the political system remain unanswered. The situation in the country became worse.

When asked about their current situation and their future retirement plans
An interviewee still residing in Lebanon answered:

“The economic situation is dramatic. Shops and restaurants are closing down. Employees -who are not laid off- are getting half salaries. Prices are increasing tremendously as no one is controlling. Banks are holding our money. We are just beggars: begging the banks to give us a drop of our own money. What’s next?” L40

Another one added:

“We are all vexed and discouraged. We had high hopes but now things are turning very bad. We feel trapped. Embassies were recommended not to issue visas. Our money is trapped at the banks. We cannot move. We cannot make any plan.” L30

As mentioned in the literature review (Gibran, 1933, Mizrahi and al., 2020, Youssef, 2020), Lebanese residents and immigrants are in despair. They lost hope in the country and its politicians.

When asked about products they buy
A middle class man residing in Lebanon explained:

“I am the only bread earner supporting my family. I carefully compare prices and quality of the products I am buying. I want to buy Lebanese products. But they are more expensive than imported ones. So I buy the imported ones” L30

A well-off resident added:

“The private banks have put many restrictions on withdrawing money from our own bank deposits. Even the citizens who are well-off became more price conscious. Rich and poor consumers tend to buy cheapest products which was not the main purchase criteria before the deteriorating economic situation and the banks restrictions” L50

Another interviewee residing in Lebanon:

“As business traders are not able to import foreign products due to the banks restrictions on liquidity, business loans, letters of credit, and facilities of payment, thus I am buying Lebanese products which – to tell you the truth – turn out to be of good quality. We have to regain trust in locally made products.” L64
A Lebanese entrepreneur stressed:

“We definitely need to support the Lebanese industry as many companies are laying off their staff members. It is crucial to save the Lebanese producers and avoid unemployment and a deeper financial crisis. I am buying Lebanese products and I am recommending my friends to do so.” L40

A well to do emigrant suggested:

“Given the devaluation of the Lebanese currency and banks restrictions on withdrawing dollars, I am investing in real estate. I am buying land as the saying ‘buy land my son as they do not make of it anymore’.” A50

Two other emigrants explained:

“We as expatriates are gathering some funds to support the Lebanese economy. But we have to put them in safe hands” US40

“We are meeting regularly to discuss how we can support the protestors. We want them to keep going strong till Lebanon would stand up again as “The Switzerland of the East”. We have high hopes.” US50

As mentioned in the literature review, consumers with high ethnocentrism prefer to buy locally made products (Shiffman and Wisenblit, 2019, Sharma, 2015; Farah and Mehdi, 2021; Watson, 2000). However, the economic situation in Lebanon is alarming. The industrial sector is collapsing, many companies are laying off staff. The financial crisis is alarming. However, very few people are hoping for a better future (Shaar, 2019).

When asked about their identity

A young student:

“I still believe that protesting and by putting pressure on the politicians will lead to improving the system in Lebanon. We want to get rid of all the corrupted leaders as per the revolution slogan “All means ALL”. Then, I will be proud to say: “I am Lebanese” L18

Another young student said:

“I want to stay in Lebanon and be proud to say that I am Lebanese, Unfortunately, the corrupted politicians have stolen my dreams and my identity” C18

Other interviewees commented:

“I do not want to be Lebanese, but being Lebanese is associated with corruption” E40

“I want to forget about my Lebanese identity as I do not want to be classified as corrupted and dishonest. When in Lebanon, I feel I am an emigrant in my own country” US25

“I am dying to get another identity” L30
As mentioned in the literature review (Mizrahi and al, 2020, Youssef, 2020), eighteen months after the revolution has started, some Lebanese have lost hope because of the political paralysis and the alarming economic situation.

**Analysis & Recommendations**

From the data collected (as per Matrix Summary 1), the researchers have noticed that the October 17, 2019 Revolution against the corrupted political leaders which gathered thousands of demonstrators from different gender, age groups and religious affiliation did not have a lasting effect. The deteriorating economic situation is worse, the corrupted politicians are still playing games and the people are becoming poorer and their frustration is increasing. Given the current situation, the hope for a brain drain reversal is lost. Lebanese people feel angry and devastated.

From the interviewees’ feedback, the researchers concluded that the Lebanese who are residing in the Western countries are not willing to come back to Lebanon as most of them have integrated well within the foreign community. Lebanese people who are residing in the Arab countries would consider coming back to Lebanon as they are unable to get any citizenship rights over there.

Based on the interviewees’ insight, the researchers hope to develop an efficient marketing strategy that will hopefully stop &/or reverse the brain drain. The researchers hope that boosting the Lebanese identity will increase demand for locally made products which will improve the economic situation and hopefully will contribute to the intellectual and cultural reconstruction of Lebanon.

The researchers’ marketing strategy focuses on decreasing corruption and regaining trust in Lebanon and its economy. This can be achieved by improving the quality of locally made products and acquiring a competitive edge over imported ones. This competitive edge can strengthen the identity of the Lebanese people and will encourage locals and emigrants to purchase Lebanese products which will boost the local economy. As mentioned in the literature review, the words of Gibran still hold today “Pity the nation that wears a cloth it does not weave, eats a bread it does not harvest, and drinks a wine that flows not from its own wine-press...”(Gibran, 1933). According to Gibran, boosting local production is essential for a nation in order to reach self-sufficiency, economic independence and stability.

In their marketing strategy, the researchers aspire at increasing local production aiming at creating jobs for the Lebanese workforce. Lebanese job seekers should be given priority over non-Lebanese candidates. They should be selected based on their abilities, skills and specific job qualifications. A reliable social security system should be implemented in order to ensure long-term job stability and decrease employees’ turnover. Lebanese will then regain trust in their country and will not plan leaving it. The brain drain will be reversed as
Lebanese working abroad will consider returning to their homeland where new challenging job opportunities will be available to them.

It is important to focus on the role of the media towards promoting the country’s image (locally and abroad). The media should not focus on any negative image of Lebanon. Newspapers, magazines, broadcasting channels, and social platforms should reflect unbiased and balanced statement of events, transmitting a positive image of the country’s nature, its products and its system. The role of the media will be vital in promoting the performance of the industrial sector and elevating the image of locally produced products and services many of which have earned awards from reputable international agencies.

The researchers believe that promoting the image of Lebanon, its year-round warm weather, its beautiful natural landscape, its abundant historic sites and its numerous religious landmarks will encourage ecotourism and religious tourism which will boost the country’s economy and improve its GDP. In addition, developing various types of tourism in rural areas will generate jobs to locals in their own villages.

**Conclusion**

The researchers hope that this feeling of patriotism and sense of belonging that emanated from the October 17, 2019 Revolution will be reflected on the Lebanese purchase behavior. At a time in the future, when the demands of the revolutionists will be reached, then Lebanese will be proud of their identity.

The researchers also hope that this boom in patriotism will remain and develop in ethnocentrism. Residents and emigrants will start building trust in Lebanon and its future leading to a higher demand for locally made products and services.

The researchers have stopped their analysis up to eighteen month after the October 17, 2019 Revolution. Further research will be needed as things change and events develop quickly in Lebanon as many internal and external factors affect the situation.

**Matrix Summary 1. Interviewees’ feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the October 17, 2019 Revolution</th>
<th>During the October 17, 2019 Revolution</th>
<th>Eighteen month after the October 17, 2019 Revolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When asked about what made them leave Lebanon:</td>
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<td>When asked about what made them leave Lebanon:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The civil war and political struggle: US50 E50 C50, C40</td>
<td>- Five respondents will go back if they find safety, stability and no corruption: US40, E30, C50, US64, E50</td>
<td>- Lebanese residing in Lebanon expressed their disappointment: L30, L40, L50, L64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Education and job opportunities: US40, C30, A25, A30, A64</td>
<td>- One respondent will go back if no more religious</td>
<td>- Two respondents referred to the dilemma the soldiers and army forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Five feel nostalgic: C50, E50, US64, US40, E30</td>
<td>-Two respondents referred to the economic problems: L40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about how they feel towards the country they are living in today:
- One respondent felt nostalgic: E25
- Four felt discriminated and neglected: US25, E30, E40, US18
- One was able to integrate from the beginning: A18
- One was able to integrate at a later stage: US50.

When asked about how they feel towards the country they are living in today:
- Two enjoy it: C30, C40
- One respondent mentioned that his kids are confused: A40
- Five respondents are optimistic about the future of Lebanon
- One is building a villa: A50

When asked about their current situation and future and retirement plans:
- Two Lebanese residing in Lebanon expressed their wish to leave: L30, L18
- One emigrant wanted to launch a touristic project in Lebanon but changed his mind: C64.

When asked about their current situation and future and retirement plans:
- Three respondents have hopes of a new Lebanon: L18, L30, E30
- Two emigrants still have doubts: US64, C30
- Two expressed their regrets: C50, US50

When asked about country of origin of products they buy:
- Lebanese residing in Lebanon do not buy locally made products: L18
- An emigrant suggested that the government should support local production E40
- One Lebanese residing abroad, feels nostalgic searches for Lebanese products and advised his friends to do so US30

When asked about country of origin of products they buy:
- One respondent residing in Lebanon will buy: L18
- One emigrant will buy: E40
- One emigrant will buy if assured of the quality: C30
- One resident in Lebanon will buy some local and some foreign products: L40

When asked about country of origin of products they buy:
- Two residents of Lebanon wants to buy Lebanese products, but given the economic situation, they go for the cheapest: L30, L50
- Two residing in Lebanon want to support local products: L64, L40
- One emigrant is investing in land in Lebanon: A50
- Two emigrants are collecting funds to support the economy of Lebanon: US40, US50.

When asked about their identity:
- When asked about their identity:
- When asked about their identity:
Lebanese carrying foreign passports identify themselves to that foreign country: US40, E25, C18, US18
- one emigrant refuses to be tagged as Lebanese: US18
- Lebanese residing in Lebanon deny their identity: L30,L50, L40
- one emigrant is lost: A64

Young respondents expressed their pride to be Lebanese: ” C30, L18, E18, L30, A50
- One emigrant expressed his hopes of a better future and will identify himself as Lebanese: E40
- One emigrant is proud of Lebanon: US50

One Lebanese residing in Lebanon has high hopes from the revolution
- One emigrant blames politicians of stealing his identity: C18
- Three respondents are rejecting the Lebanese identity as it is associated with corruption: E40, US25, L30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Test of Trustworthiness, adapted from Bassey (2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Has there been prolonged engagement with the data source?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- The researchers are interested in the topic because they live in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon and are suffering from the high level of corruption. They are also concerned about the economic situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Has there been persistent observation of emerging issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Yes. The researchers have been following up the successive events for the last two years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Has there been sufficient triangulation of data leading to analytical statements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Yes. The researchers have used primary data obtained from interviews (online and through phone calls) as well as private written messages, online feedback and posts on social media supplemented with secondary data from local and foreign newsprints and TV reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Is the account of the research sufficiently detailed to give the reader confidence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Reporting the results of two years research work is quite enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Does the case record provide an adequate trail?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- The researchers have kept the interview transcripts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


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Shaar, R. (2019, October 19). Last Call... Please Save Lebanon! *An Nahar*.


