PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE PURCHASE DECISIONS OF CONSUMERS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media influencers have been gaining momentum in the recent years due to the vast development of social media and branding. Thus, this work has examined the influence of social media celebrities on the buying decision of Saudi customers. This study was based on quantitative method. Questionnaire was utilized for data collection among a general population of 101 Saudi customers. Result was analyzed in basic statistic form. The results showed that celebrities influence the customers purchase decision of product by endorsing the brands through the advertisements. The findings showed an attachment of the customers to the celebrities that they prefer. These customers would like to imitate their preferred celebrities in buying and using the same products. Hence it is concluded that the attractiveness of the celebrity, the use of the product by the celebrity, positive image of the

celebrity and consumer seeing them as celebrities has significance influence of product purchase decision.

1   INTRODUCTION

Social media, in recent years, have known a significant growth thanks to the evolution of the Internet but also through media such as smartphones and tablets [1]. Simplified access to the WI-FI also played a significant role on access to these platforms. These tools have developed their audiences during recent times, their features have also evolved. Indeed, companies have managed to adapt and absorb this strong popularity to prospect and develop their targets [2]. Today an e-merchant or an international firm must be present on social media to be visible on the Internet. They are a good way to publicize online store and an acquisition channel in a cost effective way [3]. Social networks have changed the daily habits of a generation and marketing professionals have quickly understood the importance of integrating social media in their marketing strategy [4]. Purchasing decisions are increasingly impacted by the use of social networks [5].

The power of social media is such that today a good number of Internet users buy products they have previously discovered on social networks [6]. It should be noted that majority of consumers tend to make purchases after recommendation on social media [7]. In addition, the role of social media is to create and maintain a customer relationship, strong and sustainable, through a quality retention strategy [8]. According to research on social media and e-commerce, 62% of Internet users are present on at least one social network, 53% of Internet users have already bought a product after seeing an ad on the Internet online, and 78% of sellers who use social networks to communicate with their customers have better results than those who are not present on social networks [9].

There have been changes in today's marketing strategies, following the growth of internet. Accordingly, organizations are taking different lines in enhancing their sales. Organizations are targeting famous social media influencers for advertising their products, among other advertising tools for driving sales [10]. Social media influencers have become a powerful tool for marketing lead to increase online and offline sales. Nowadays advertisers would prefer just not to amplify the offers of the item yet in addition to make the brand value [10]. For making the brand value, they are utilizing the big names in notices. Component and speculations of big name support such as celebrities give a brand a touch of marvelousness and the expectation that an acclaimed face will give included interest and name acknowledgment in a swarmed advertise [11].

There are several works done regarding social media influencers on marketing products. Booth et al. [12] presented a work on mapping and utilizing influencers in online networking to shape corporate brand recognitions and found that impact customary target gatherings of people, and help interchanges experts build up compelling marketing strategies. Freberg et al. [13] evaluated the public perception of social media influencers and found that most public see them a significant pulling factor in purchase decisions. Khamis et al. [14] analyzed the influence of social media influencers and self-branding, and found that the increase of social media influencers has persisted self-branding and this has enhanced product marketing for companies. Abidin et al. [15] analyzed the engagement of social media influencers with fashion brands and found that these fashion brand experiences significant uptrend in market sales. Gensler et al. [16] analyzed internet based life's effect on brand the executives and found that purchaser produced brand stories shared through web based life influence brand execution. Vernuccio et al. [17] analyzed the key methodologies in conveying a corporate brand through social media and discovered empowering viable utilization of social media for brand showcasing. Enginkaya et al. [18] investigate shoppers' inspirations to cooperate with the brands via web-based networking media and found that web-based social networking influencers assumed a critical job in persuading customers with brand affiliation.

In addition, Ioanid et al. [19] examined online life techniques for associations utilizing influencers' capacity and found that potential clients may be educated about certain items through the web based life influencers. Glucksman et al. [20] investigated the significance of social media influencers on brand marketing and found that these influencers advance brands through their own lives, making them relatable to the normal customer. Uzunoğlu et al. [21] examined the job of bloggers in brand correspondence and found that bloggers' support empowered brands to market and spread its visibility in vast manner.

Thus, social media influencers have become a powerful tool for marketing. Some influencers in Saudi Arabia are most effective to develop social selling and increase Internet sales, including the type of information and the format of the message. Therefore, this work was done to evaluate the role of social media influencers to shape, modify and change the views of customers on purchase decisions. This work was focused on concentrate on how internet influencers and celebrities may affect customer purchase decision in Saudi Arabia. The scope of this work has targeted Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arabic influencers in social media as the primary source of importance.

2   METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this work was to analyze the role of social media influencers in effecting the customers buying decisions. Thus, accordingly, this work has used

quantitative research methodology. This method approach provides the best opportunities for answering the important research questions, the answers of which rely upon a variety of forms of data. Furthermore, this is critical to answer the aforementioned research questions relying on many advantages of this quantitative method [22]. For this work, questionnaire was developed with question regarding consumer's reaction, attitude and purchase intention when they see an advertisement that is done or performed by social media influencers. These forms are filled out and returned by the respondents. This is an inexpensive, useful method where literacy rates are high and co-operative respondents. The population of this study was Saudi Arabia customers. Questionnaire was distributed to 101 respondents. The results were analyzed in basic statistic form for the respond received and was presented accordingly. The overall method flow is shown in Figure 1.
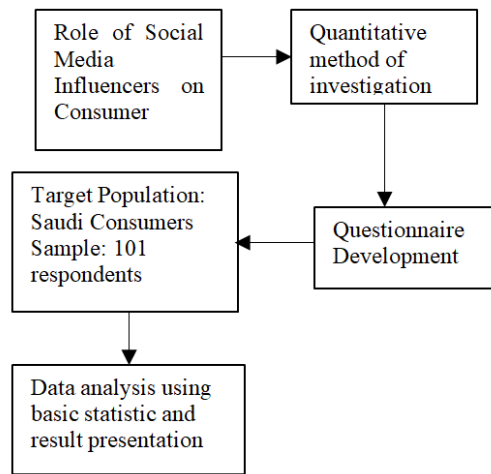

Figure 1: Summarized workflow of this study.

3   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Characteristic

The participants in this study were forming approximately 101 persons, and since the study concerns the consumers in Saudi Arabia that are affected and being influenced by social media celebrities, it was noticed that the great majority are women (73 persons), whereas the men were just 28 persons. As for the age category, more than 40% of them are between 18 and 25. Additionally, there are two segments that are close and these mainly concern the segments of "26-36" and "37-47" years old, which were respectively representing 24% and 27% of the population of the

study. The celebrities through the advertising in the social media easily influence these real consumers. In addition, 8% of the respondents were in the age range of 47-60 years. Only 2% were above the age of 60. In terms of level of education, Nearly 50 participants are holding their BA (Bachelors) and more than 25% are having their Masters diplomas. If it shows anything, it shows that these people know what they do and they are not 100% absent minded while making their choices.

3.2 Questionnaire Analysis

Based on Figure 2, the respondents stated that they are mostly convinced and they opt for more buying options when seeing advertisements through the internet (33.3%) or through newspapers (24.8%). Others, who were more classical in their reflection, said that they adopt more traditional ways in their choices, such as the radio (18.1%) and the magazine (15.2%). For the television, the rate was very low with 8.6%.
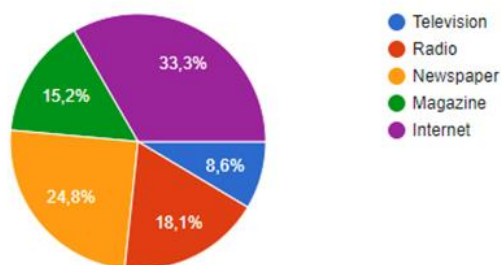

Figure 2: Means of advertising persuasion to purchase product

According to the participants based on Figure 3, the most appropriate social media for celebrities to advertise products are Instagram (32.4%) and Twitter (29.5%). For Facebook, it is not very extended and popular in Saudi Arabia and people as well as celebrities prefer to use other means and other media. Facebook occupied the fourth place with 13.3% preceded by Snap Chat with 24.8%.

Based on Figure 4, 43.8% of the respondents said that the quality of the product is the most important element that they need from any product. Then, 41.3% of them said that they often look who is advertising for the product they want to buy and what celebrity is exposing the services or the products. Another 15.2% of the participants said that the price of the product is also very important in the choice of the products, especially for those with low or average income.
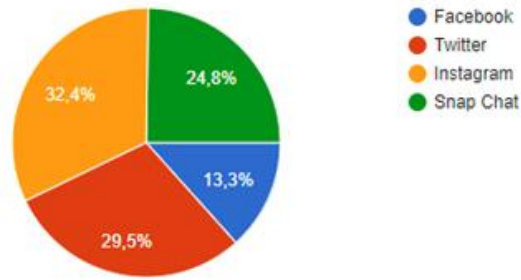
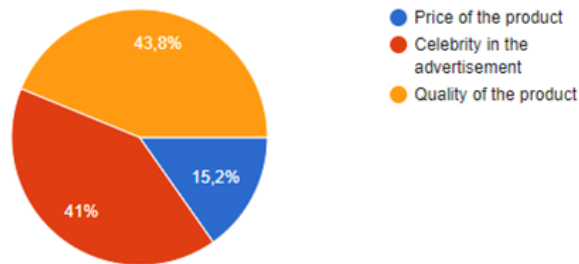Figure 3: Appropriate social media for celebrities to advertise products

Figure 4: Value the most when buying a product

Based on Figure 5, the participants were asked this question to make sure they understand why companies choose celebrities. 37.1% think that these companies are out of ideas and innovation and so, they do what other competitors do. 33.3% of the participants say that the companies choose these celebrities as they are able to increase sales and profits. Then, another 10.5% of them think that these celebrities are having the capacity to compete strongly.
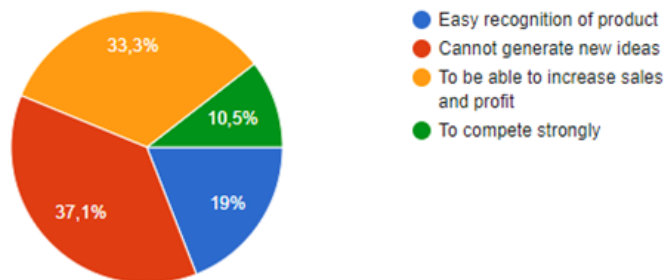
Figure 5: The reason for the companies to choose celebrity endorsement for promoting their products

Based on Figure 6, the participants justified their choices of the products and they were not agreeing unanimously nor disagreeing that it is the attractiveness of the celebrity that makes them buy. 33 (31.4%) of participants expressed this.

In addition, based on Figure 7, 34.3% of the participants agreed that most people buy a certain product, just because a celebrity is using it. Moreover, even more than that when we find that another 19% are strongly disagreeing about this fact, which makes it to 55%. In addition, the respondents has also stated that Taking a decision of buying according to the participants, depends mainly on the influence of the celebrity and this is what 31.4% of the participants agreed on. Participants said that the celebrities when advertising for a product, they do not necessarily use it and this view was shared and agreed by more than 35.2% of the participants
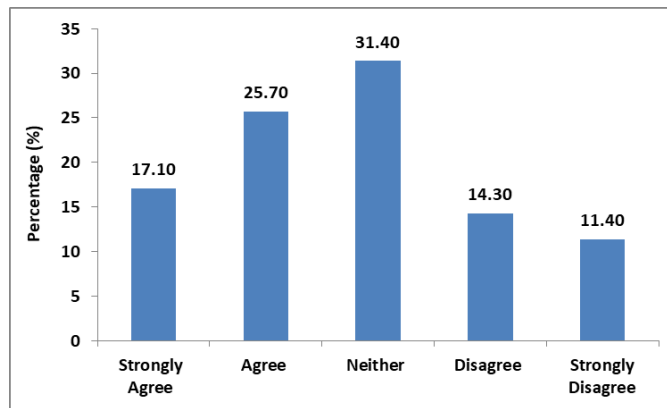

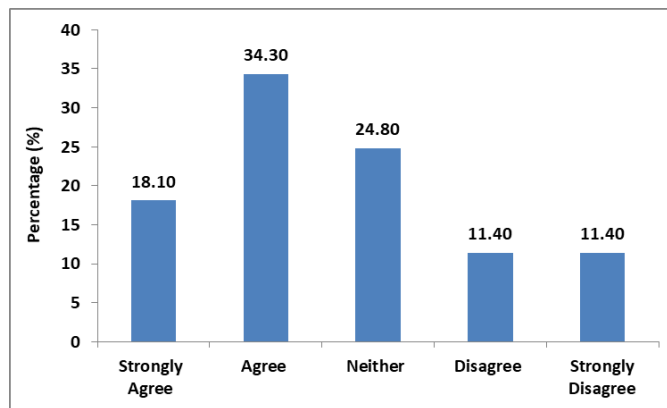Figure 6: Buying product based on the attractiveness of the celebrity

Figure 7: Buying product the celebrities are using it

Based on Figure 8, regarding about the decision of buying following the advertisement of the product by the favorite celebrity, the participants agreed with more than 41% of the decisions that they would surely make a positive buying decision.

Based on Figure 9, the results of this question, which deals with the celebrity images, contrasted a little bit different ideas, views, and opinions. The participants though were thinking about a general agreement that their celebrities give positive images of the brand (31.4%).

Based on Figure 10, the participants do not think that these advertised products are of good quality as when using this it is often just because of the unconscious influence of these advertisers and celebrities (35.2%).
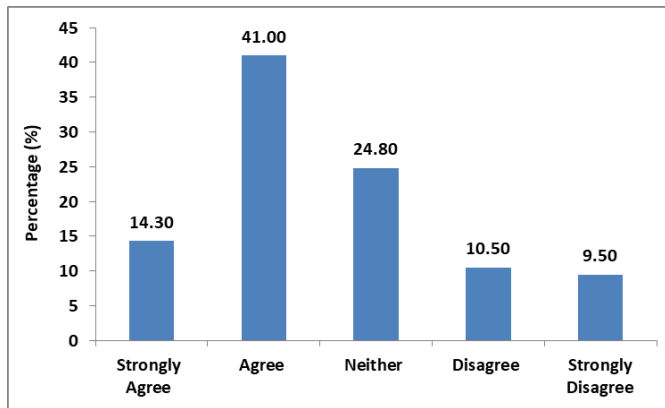

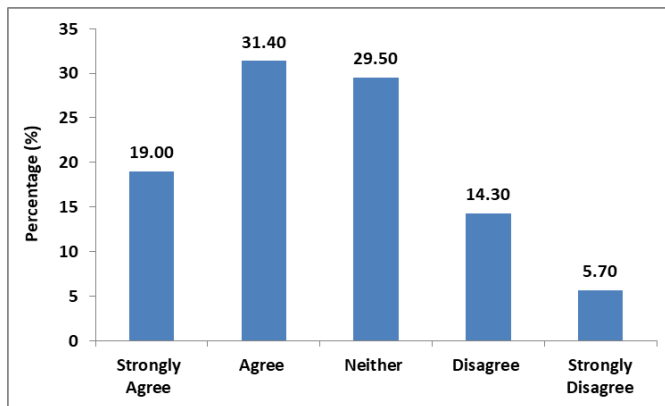Figure 8: Buy a product if my favorite celebrity is advertising it

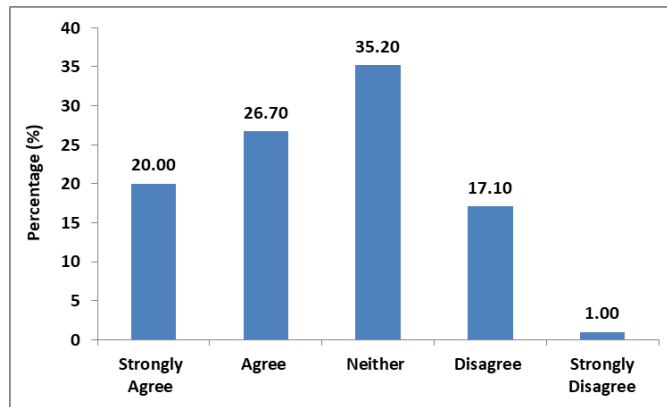Figure 9: Favorite celebrity gives a positive image to the brand

Figure 10: Don't believe products specifically advertised by the celebrity are of good quality

Based on Figure 11, the participants at last were sure that the fact of using the celebrities was not for the sake of pleasing the customers, but to raise and increase the revenues of the companies with 33.3% of the respondents agreeing to it.
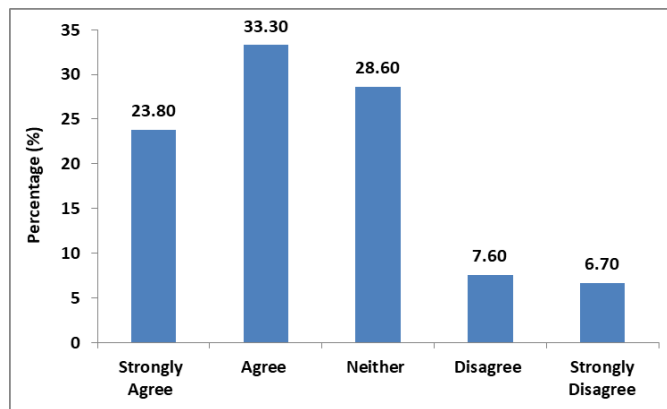

Figure 11: Influencers help companies to increase total revenue

3.3 Overall Discussion

On the influence of the decision of buying by social media influencers in Saudi Arabia, the respondents who are at the same time customers were having different ideas and opinions, but all in all, all the views were positive and they reinforced the

fact that these social media influencers perform a subconscious job of attracting the customers to buy and to try the products without knowing that they are doing so. This outcome is consistent with the work done by Forbes et al. [23] where it was reported that social media influencers indirectly attract consumer's attention to a product or brand.

Next, the finding of this work has shown that the majority of the participants are females, aged between 18 and 45 and this shows that the segment of customers is extended and that this same segment uses the social media and knows exactly what products are being advertised by which celebrities. The fact that was impressive is that Facebook is forgotten in this operation and other social media are seen, such as Instagram, Twitter and Snap Chat. This is agreed by the work of De Veirman et al. [24] where it was reported that most social influencer use Instagram for their brand development and marketing, where reviews of product were promptly posted as live status.

On the other hand, the finding has shown that the consumers prefer to buy a product that is often utilized by their favorite celebrity and that is of a good quality. This outcome is also consistent with the reported work of Kapitan et al. [25] where it was stated that consumers are attracted to use the product endorsed by celebrities and it has a significant pulling factor. Nevertheless, some participants said that these advertised products are not of good quality especially, when the consumers discover themselves that the product is not of a good quality.

In addition, the finding of this work has shown that the respondents are aware that the companies often use celebrities in their advertisements to pull the consumer for product purchase and enhance the sales of the company for a good profit. This was also agreed by the work of Lim et al. [26] where companies are currently making use of the development of social media influencers for the benefits of product marketing and sales boosting. On the other hand, the celebrities, who are being used for endorsement, are seen to be attractive and that is why people see themselves in these celebrities when using such products. It is often a psychological process. This is agreed by Russell et al. [27] in work which reported that consumers tend purchase a product endorsed by celebrity with the mindset of attempting to look like the celebrities. Thus overall, it can be deduced that social media influencers in Saudi has a significant effect on customers purchase intention.

4   CONCLUSION

This work was carried out to evaluate the role of social media influencers on customers on purchase decisions in Saudi Arabia. The key findings of this work showed that social media influencers significantly influence the customers purchase decision through brand advertisements and endorsement. In addition, the finding has showed that these customers value the celebrity more when buying a product, rather

than the price and the quality. In addition, celebrities endorsed were mainly used by the companies to increase the sales and the profits as agreed by the majority of the respondents. Thus, it can be concluded that the attractiveness of the celebrity, the use of the product by the celebrity, positive image of the celebrity and consumer seeing them as celebrities has significance influence of product purchase decision.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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