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AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING AND CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISION IN THE SAUDI ARABIA FASHION MARKET: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Social media advertising is a significant feature of digital marketing; it is an important marketing tool in the fashion industry since it can influence promoting mentalities, brand perspectives, and buying expectations. In Saudi Arabia, social media advertising has a significant influence upon consumers' purchase decisions. However, Saudi social life is based on Islamic foundations which shape the national culture; this creates an obstacle for many Saudi consumers when it comes to fashion advertisements on social media. Hence, this study aims to investigate the cultural factors influencing Saudi consumers' purchase decisions in the context of fashion YouTube adverts. This study adopts a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with Saudi consumers. The results reveal that Saudi consumers' purchase decision towards fashion advertisements on YouTube is highly influenced by the following: 1) Islamic foundations, 2) Celebrities, 3) Language, 4) Online word of mouth, and 5) Consistency and repetition.

Keywords: Social Media Advertising, Purchase Decision, Fashion Industry, Cultural Factors, Saudi Consumers.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing refers to how an organization should create and trade value with clients to meet the client's needs, an effective business relies upon effective marketing (Silk, 2006). Nowadays, digital marketing is a critical part of marketing practice; it is one type of marketing that centres around the utilisation of data technology for marketing practice (Fu et al., 2016). One significant and powerful feature of digital marketing is social media advertising (Guarda et al., 2021). Social media advertising is simply any piece of online content designed with a persuasive intent and/or distributed via a social media platform that enables Internet users to access, share, engage with,

add to, and co-create (Alhabash and Ma, 2017). Social media advertising can be grouped into paid, owned, and earned media (Hurrle and Postanty, 2015).

Research has shown that social media advertising has a significant impact on consumers' buying decisions (Ohajionu and Mathews, 2015), as it can influence consumers' mentalities, brand perspectives, and buying expectations (Henderson and Bowley, 2010). Thus, fashion brands should consider the use of social media advertising in their marketing campaigns, since it can introduce more clients to organisations and facilitate two-way communication between firms and clients (Chiang et al., 2019; Nadaraja and Yazdanifard 2013).

In Saudi Arabia, the power of social media advertising is similar to that of many other countries around the world (Al Saud and Khan, 2013). Social media advertising plays a major role in influencing Saudi consumers' online buying behaviour (Khatib, 2016). However, since Saudi social life is established on Islamic principles (Sahin, 2014), Islam plays a central role in defining the culture and acts as a major force in determining the social norms, patterns, traditions, obligations, privileges and practices of society (Al-Saggaf, 2004) this can give rise to sensitivities and challenges when advertising through social media. This is particularly the case when promoting fashion items, where the type of imagery typically used may be considered to be culturally unacceptable to some Saudi consumers. The fashion industry was selected because fashion advertising could be an issue for Muslim consumers since it has a strong association with Western culture (Kalliny, 2012). As such, this study aims to investigate the impact of culture on how YouTube fashion adverts affect Saudi consumers' buying decisions. The paper first reviews pertinent literature relating to social media advertising, buying decisions and the impact of culture. The methodology employed for this study is then outlined. The research results are then reported and discussed. Finally, the study's recommendations and conclusions are outlined.

Research Question

The research question for this study is: **"What is the impact of social media advertising on consumers' buying behaviour within the fashion industry in Saudi Arabia?"**

Research Objectives

Based on the aim of this study, this study seeks to address three objectives:

- To investigate the cultural factors causing Saudi consumers to skip or continue to watch fashion adverts on YouTube.
- To understand which cultural aspects lead Saudi consumers to purchase decisions within the fashion industry.
- To put forward recommendations for marketers and fashion brands in Saudi Arabia to help them adapt to Saudi consumers' buying behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Advertising and Consumers' Purchase Decision

Social networking sites as computer programs and interactive platforms that allow users to discuss, create, modify, and share user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The emphasis on Internet services has shifted from being utilization-based towards being more interactive and shared by social media platforms, opening new doors for communication among associations and the general public (Henderson and Bowley, 2010). Social media advertising is

defined as paid and organic advertisements on social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Snapchat, among others (Jung et al., 2016).

Today, more than 82% of the people in Saudi Arabia use social networks as part of their daily lives (Gmi, 2023). With 40.20 million mobile users and 116% of the population being mobile users, the social media presence of Saudi Arabia has the most presence worldwide (Gmi, 2023). As in many countries around the world, social media is powerful and highly influential in Saudi Arabia (Al Saud and Khan, 2013). Saudis spend an average of 3 hours and 01 minutes each day on social media (HootSuite. 2023). As a result, Saudi Arabia has the highest number of active users on Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) area (HootSuite. 2023). YouTube is the most-used social media platform in Saudi Arabia with 29.10 million YouTube Saudi active users, representing 76% of the population. This makes it one of the most important tools for advertising in Saudi (HootSuite. 2023). All social media statistics in Saudi Arabia show that millennials and Gen Z-ers are in charge of influencing the numbers on social media platforms in Saudi Arabia, and they are the most important; understanding their behaviour will help advertisers increase the value of their life through properly designated services and products (HootSuite. 2023). Brands should pay more attention to new generations and address the Saudi generation through the material they like. The below table shows the 2023 Saudi internet and social media users (GMI, 2023).

Table 1
Saudi Social Media Users

Saudi Internet Users	99%
Social Media Users	28.81 million
Saudi Female Social Media Advertising Audience	34.20%
Saudi Male Social Media Advertising Audience	65.80%

The below table shows the percentage of social media Saudi users for each social media platform each month in 2023 (GMI, 2023).

Table 2
Saudi Social Media Platform

YouTube	29.10 million
WhatsApp	22.33 million
Instagram	20.49 million
X	18.33 million
Snapchat	18.38 million
Tik-Tok	18.04 million
Facebook	17.69 million
LinkedIn	6.72 million
Telegram	14.83 million
FB Messenger	12.73 million
Pinterest	7.63 million

Moreover, consumers rely on a range of beliefs to form judgments about a product or service, which may potentially influence their buying decisions (Veale, 2008). Social media advertising dramatically influences consumers' purchase decisions when compared to traditional

advertising (Kim and Ko, 2010). Social media advertising is crucial in Saudi Arabia, and it plays a major role in influencing Saudi consumers' online buying behaviour (Khatib, 2016). A survey of 200 Saudi individuals on the role of social media in brand development was conducted (Al Saud and Khan, 2013). The study revealed that for 60.6% of Saudi consumers, the decision to purchase from a brand was because of social media advertising. A later survey of 310 individuals in the Aseer region in the southwest of Saudi Arabia was conducted on the impact of social media characteristics on purchases (Khatib, 2016). The study showed that Saudi consumers' buying decision is influenced by social media, and consumers are actively utilizing social media platforms to validate their buying decisions (Khatib, 2016).

Fashion Industry and Social Media Advertising

The fashion sector is likely one of the most successful in Saudi Arabia (Singh et al., 2017). Indeed, the luxury *fashion* segment in *Saudi Arabia* is projected to grow by 3.99% (2023-2027) resulting in a market volume *of* $619.80m in 2027 (Statista, 2023). Regardless of the restricted societal standards that govern dress and appearance in Saudi Arabia and that fashion is driven by its culture which is based on Islam, interest in a vast range of clothes and accessories is rapidly growing (Singh et al., 2017). The fashion of a culture reflects the physical and social context in which it is based (Forney and Rabolt, 1997). In Saudi Arabia, fashion is driven by its culture which is based on Islam (Forney and Rabolt, 1997).

Furthermore, as purchasers transition to digital modes of buying, the use of social media in buying luxury goods is becoming increasingly widespread (Khan and Fazili, 2019). The use of social media advertising in the fashion industry is very important since it may connect more clients to firms/businesses and allow for intentional two-way communication between firms and clients (Chiang el al., 2019). Research examining how fashion retail firms use Internet media, revealed that social media advertising is a powerful tool in the fashion industry (Ertemel and Ammoura, 2016). However, despite Saudi Arabia's fast-growing fashion sector, there has been little research on the influence of fashion-based social media advertising in the country, and its impact on consumer purchasing decisions is not well understood (Alatawy, 2022).

Cultural Factors and Consumers' Buying Decision

The most fundamental determinant of desire and behaviour is culture (Kotler and Keller, 2009). Culture is a common pattern of interaction in a community that includes an individual's beliefs, values, and behaviours (Keesing, 1981). Cultural factors include culture, sub-culture, and social class system (Kotler and Keller, 2009). Since the effect of culture on purchasing behaviour differs by nation, marketers must make careful considerations and, in certain cases, exercise extreme caution when assessing the culture of various countries, groups, or regions.

In Saudi Arabia, culture has been one of the key areas of concern for businesses and advertising due to the power and effect it may have in acquiring or losing clients (Sahin, 2014). Culture plays an important role in Saudi consumers buying decisions (Kalliny, 2012). It is critical to focus on cultural values such as language, religion, and norms, and for these to be aligned with receivers (Sahin, 2014). Cultural factors are very important, as most of the factors that discourage Saudi consumers from purchasing online in Saudi Arabia are cultural (AlGhamdi, 2011). Similarly, some studies concur that culture plays an important role in the impact of social media advertising on Saudi consumers (Mansour, 2015; Khatib, 2016). These studies reveal that

external cultural factors influencing Saudi consumers towards social media advertising include such factors as religion, reference groups, and social norms.

First religion, religion is an essential cultural aspect to investigate since it is one of the most fundamental cultural factors, significantly impacting people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Sahin, 2014). In addition, Religion provides a set of beliefs that customers may rely on to ensure the accuracy of their decisions (Alsaad et al., 2022). Saudi Arabia is an Arab country that practices Islam and is based on Islamic foundations (Kraidy, 2009). Therefore, Islam plays a substantial role in the buying behaviours of Saudi consumers (Sahin, 2014). As a result, Saudi culture is often seen as a strict society, since it is derived from Islamic customs (Ajina, 2019).

Muslim consumers are highly influenced by Islam religion when it comes to the purchase decision of luxury goods or Western products (Solomon et al., 2014; Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Tjahjono, 2014). However, some studies disagrees with this (Abalkhail, 2021; Nwankwo et al., 2014). Unlike a study on the level of religiosity, it is not found to be negatively related to luxury purchase intention in Saudi Arabia (Rehman et al., 2022). However, another study stated that Islam is very important when it comes to consumers' attitudes (Farrag and Hassan, 2015). The study revealed that consumers following Islamic teachings have negative attitudes towards fashion. The result confirmed that religion plays an essential role in shaping consumers' attitudes and preferences.

The second factor is reference groups. **Reference groups are groups surrounding the consumer such as (family, friends, social groups, or work groups) which can** impact consumers' attitudes and behaviour (Hoonsopon and Puriwat, 2016). A reference group helps shape a person's attitudes and behaviours. Family is a central pillar around which personality, beliefs, and ethics are built in Arab society (Barakat, 1993). More specifically, in Saudi Arabia families and other society members can highly influence Saudi consumers' attitudes (Al Saud and Khan, 2013). Most previous literature examining the impact of reference groups on Saudis confirms that Saudis are highly impacted by others (Semaan et al., 2019; Al Saud and Khan, 2013; Khatib, 2016; Alansari et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2015; Kushwah, 2020). The studies show that peer and family influence is the primary source of motivation for purchasing fashion and luxury items in the Gulf region.

The third influential factor is social norms, Coleman (1994) define it as "rules and standards understood by group members guiding and constraining social behaviour." Studies affirm that Saudi consumers in Saudi Arabia are significantly influenced by their social norms in their buying decisions Mansour, 2015; Semaan, 2019. These studies indicate that Saudi consumers' attitudes are shaped by social norms regarding advertisements. However, different perspectives exist in the literature regarding whether this influence is positive or negative. While some believe social norms have a positive impact on consumers' attitudes and purchasing behaviour (Etuk, 2022), the debate continues.

Previous research has examined the impact of social media advertising on consumers' buying decisions in general. However, there is a dearth of research addressing the influence of cultural factors on Saudi consumers' buying decisions related to YouTube fashion ads, despite YouTube's prominence as the most-used social media platform in Saudi Arabia (HootSuite, 2020) and the considerable influence of culture on Saudi consumers (Sahin, 2014). Additionally, there is limited qualitative research on consumer buying decisions and social media advertising in Saudi

Arabia, resulting in a lack of comprehensive understanding of consumers' underlying motivations. These gaps in the existing literature, particularly in the context of cultural influence, fashion advertising on YouTube, and Saudi consumers' purchasing choices, justify the rationale for this study.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the underlying motives and feelings associated with Saudi consumers' use of social media and purchase decisions, a qualitative research approach has been undertaken. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. The sample included 10 Saudi participants (7 Females and 3 Males) aged between 18 and 35 with YouTube accounts and sufficient previous online shopping experience to be able to answer the interview questions. Prior analysis has shown that 80% of the population in Saudi Arabia within this age group (18-35) uses social media. Interviews were undertaken until the researcher reached saturation point which was after conducting 10 interviews. The interview was divided into two parts. In the first part of the interview, the participants were shown two fashion advertisements on YouTube and were asked how they felt about each of these, and why they felt this way – this was to gain an understanding of the cultural factors influencing their buying decision. The first advert was an Arabic fashion advert related to Arab culture, and the second was an English fashion advert representing western culture. The second part of the interview comprised four questions to determine the cultural aspects of a fashion advertisement on YouTube that might impact the participant's purchasing decision. The table below (Table. 1) shows the participants' backgrounds.

Table 3

Profile of the Interviewee

Participants	Gender	Age	Nationality
P.1	Female	35	Saudi
P.2	Female	18	Saudi
P.3	Male	24	Saudi
P.4	Female	20	Saudi
P.5	Female	25	Saudi
P.6	Female	18	Saudi
P.7	Male	32	Saudi
P.8	Female	34	Saudi
P.9	Female	32	Saudi
P.10	Male	28	Saudi

The semi-structured interviews included two 30-second videos and four primary interview questions (Shown in Figure 1), each question was selected to achieve the research objectives, with each interview lasting from 25 to 45 minutes. To ensure the accuracy of data analysis, all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently translated into English. Braun and Clarke's inductive method was selected to thematically identify codes and themes for the qualitative analysis process (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

What interests you in a fashion advert on YouTube that would make you continue watching the advert and maybe buy from the brand?
How do you feel about watching a fashion advertisement on YouTube if it was against Islamic principles?

How would you feel about purchasing a product solely based on a YouTube advertisement that was not suggested by a friend, family member, or celebrity?

Can you recall when you purchased a product after viewing a YouTube advertisement? Please explain in detail.

Figure. 1 Primary Interview Questions

RESULTS

At the start of the interview, participants were shown two fashion advertisements on YouTube. The first advert was in Arabic and related to Arabic culture. The second advert was in English and represented Western culture. The majority of the participants preferred the first video over the second one.

For the first question, on fashion advertisements on YouTube, participants were asked what caught their attention. This was asked at the start of the interview to get a sense of the participants' mindsets as well as what inspires them as Saudi customers to keep watching a fashion advertisement on YouTube. The majority of the participants (9 participants) believe that fashion advertisements on YouTube have no impact on their purchasing behaviour since they most often skip the adverts after the first 5 seconds. However, they may sometimes be drawn to the advertisement for several reasons such as music, offers, sales, celebrities, and colours. On the other hand, one participant out of ten believes that fashion advertising on YouTube may affect Saudi customers' purchasing decisions.

Islamic Principles

The religion of Islam is very important in Saudi culture. For the second question, participants were asked how they would feel if they saw a fashion commercial on YouTube that violated Islamic values. They were also shown two fashion adverts, one of which – the Western advert - violated Islamic norms. This question was posed to comprehend the impact of Islam on Saudi consumers' purchasing decisions in the fashion sector. The majority of the participants (8 participants) responded negatively; they were not happy with watching the second advert (western ad). Participants believe that watching anything that is anti-Islamic or does not conform to Islamic principles is inappropriate and, indeed, insulting to the Muslim community.

> Participant 7 (Male) stated: '*I think if I watched an ad that involved anything against Islam, my point of view of the brand would change like it will make me not buy from the brand again,*'. Similar to participant 7, Participant 1 (Female) mentioned that it '*wouldn't feel right to buy from a brand that encourages actions against Islam. So basically, anything against Islam I won't buy or continue to watch,*'. Also, participant 3 (Male) believe that*: "it was very disturbing watching the second ad, I wouldn't be happy watching such an ad in my country.*'

On the other hand, two participants (P.6 and P.8) would not mind seeing advertising if it violated Islamic values as long as there is no physical or emotional harm. Participants (P.6 and P.8) believe it is completely acceptable to watch fashion advertisements on YouTube that violate Islamic principles because they believe it is common and that they are accustomed to it.

> Participant 6 (Female) stated that: '*I don't really care like I have seen this too many times now, so it's just something that you get used to it. As long as it does not harm me physically or emotionally, I don't really care*' while participant 8 (Female) mentioned that '*as long as it's not rude to the Muslim community, I'm fine with watching the ad, like*

I would not accept if it would cause any harm. However, I'm totally fine with watching an ad if it was against the Islam principles.'

The 8 participants who responded negatively were disturbed by the second advert for two primary reasons. The first reason was that women were felt to be presented inappropriately due to a large amount of body exposure; in Islam, women must dress modestly. The second reason was that there was a physical relationship/interaction between females and males, representations of which are forbidden in Islam and were felt to be disturbing to watch. Hence, participants believed that publishing adverts containing exposed women or any physical interaction in a Muslim nation such as Saudi Arabia is insulting to the people and Saudi culture since they believe that Saudi culture revolves entirely around Islam.

Participant 9 (Female) mentioned that '*I wouldn't watch it. I won't feel comfortable if a body of a woman is exposed in a video ad targeting a Muslim culture*'. Similarly, participant 10 mentioned '*I did not really like the second video; it showed a lot of body exposure and physical connection. I was not comfortable watching the ad at all. I don't think I would buy from the brand after seeing this video*'. Meanwhile participant 4 (Female) stated that: '*It is very disrespectful if there was an ad against Islam being shared in a Muslim country. Physical interaction between the characters in the ad would be wrong to share in Saudi Arabia. It wouldn't target the right people; it wouldn't attract Saudis; I was uncomfortable watching such an ad.*'

Celebrity Endorsement and Online Word-of-mouth

In the third question, participants were asked how they would feel about buying a product based solely on a YouTube advertisement that had not been suggested by a friend, family member, or celebrity. This question was raised to determine the impact of others on a purchasing choice. All ten participants stated that they would never buy from a brand based only on YouTube advertising. Even though all participants mentioned that they usually end up skipping a fashion advert on YouTube if it was not recommended by someone else, they all agreed that they would continue watching the advert if it featured a celebrity they admire or if they had read a favourable online review.

Participant 2 (Female) stated that '*Maybe I would buy from the ad if it had a celebrity that I love or trust in it. But it would be very hard for me to trust or become interested in a brand just by watching a YouTube ad*,' while participant 1's (Female) answer is similar '*I believe here in Saudi Arabia everyone is influenced by celebrities. If a celebrity recommended a brand or product, everyone would go and buy it without even doing research or taking second opinions.*' Participant 3 (Male) mentioned that '*If I saw a fashion ad on YouTube that grabbed my attention, I would go and check the online reviews or feedback before buying, depending on the reviews of others I will consider whether to buy from the brand or not.'*

Language and Brand Consistency

The participants were shown two videos, one in Arabic and the other in English. Participants were asked which one they preferred and why. The question was asked to understand the importance of language in Saudi Arabia within fashion advertisements and how language can influence Saudi consumers' purchasing decisions. The majority of the participants (6 participants) preferred the first video because it was in Arabic and disliked the second video

because they perceived a language barrier between the audience and the advertisement. Nevertheless, a minority of the participants did not mind the language since they were able to understand the English Advert and did not mention anything about language (4 participants).

> Participant 5 (Female) stated that '*It might be very difficult for everyone in Saudi Arabia to understand the English Ad. So, it is better if the Ad was in Arabia*' and Participant 7 (Male) mentioned that '*It was in the English language so I think there would be some challenges in delivering the message to a Saudi person since not everyone in Saudi Arabia speaks English so there would be a language barrier.*'

In the interview's final question, participants were asked to share their experience in purchasing a product after watching a YouTube advertisement. This question was posed in order to identify what motivates consumers to make purchasing decisions. The answers were similar; the majority of the participants (7 participants) bought a product from a brand because the advert had appeared before in a YouTube video several times, after seeing the advert more than once the participants decided to click on the advert which eventually resulted in the purchase decision. While the rest of the participants (3 participants) never bought from a fashion brand based on a YouTube advert. All seven participants that purchased a fashion product based on a YouTube advert, shared one thing in common which is that they have seen the advert before more than once.

> Participant 1 (Female) indicated that '*The reason that encouraged me to buy from the brand is that the music is related to the Saudi culture and the constant appearance of the ad.*' Similar to participant 1, participant 8 (Female) stated that '*I would say that if the ad appeared several times, I would definitely consider buying the product.*' While on the other hand participant, 10 (Male) mentioned that '*I never bought from a fashion brand based on YouTube advertisement. However, I did buy from a YouTube advert about mobile phones because my friend told me about it and the ad appeared to me.*'

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study brings several new contributions to the literature on social media advertising in Saudi Arabia. To begin, the study findings provide a basis for strategies to market fashion companies on YouTube to improve consumers' buying intent in Saudi Arabia. Second, this is the first qualitative study to investigate the cultural influence of fashion YouTube advertising on customer purchase decisions in Saudi Arabia since previous studies did not focus on a specific social network or sector. Therefore, the findings of this study not only add to the literature on YouTube advertisement contexts but also provide useful insights for Saudi fashion businesses.

The analysis reveals that Saudi customers perceive YouTube advertising as having a limited impact on their fashion purchasing decisions, which contradicts previous findings (Al Saud and Khan, 2013; Kim and Ko, 2010). Notably, prior studies did not specifically explore YouTube advertising's effect on Saudi consumers' fashion choices. This highlights the need to consider the context and platform when assessing the influence of social media advertising, suggesting that generalizations may not hold universally.

The study reveals that YouTube ads may not significantly influence Saudi consumers' fashion purchases, as many respondents tend to skip ads within the first five seconds or have never made a purchase solely based on a YouTube fashion ad. This suggests that the platform's mechanics, such as the option to skip ads, limit their effectiveness. However, interviews with participants

indicate that Saudi consumers are more influenced by celebrities, reviews, recommendations, and peer opinions. Celebrity endorsements and personal recommendations have a substantial impact on their purchasing decisions. Existing research supports the idea that Saudi consumers heavily rely on social connections and online word of mouth for guidance in their fashion choices (Khatib, 20116; Al Saud and Khan, 2013). In summary, while YouTube ads alone may have a limited impact, their influence is more pronounced when combined with celebrity endorsements or recommendations, aligning with the prevailing reliance on online word of mouth and celebrity influence in Saudi consumers' purchasing decisions.

Contrary to prior research, the analysis revealed that advertising consistency and repetition play a significant role in influencing Saudi consumers' buying behaviour. While previous literature did not emphasize these factors in Saudi Arabia, the study found that Saudi customers are more likely to purchase a fashion brand if they encounter a YouTube ad multiple times and if the ad contains memorable elements. Responses to Question Three, where participants explained their purchase decisions after viewing a YouTube ad, support this conclusion. Many participants mentioned buying from a fashion company because they had seen a YouTube ad multiple times. Notably, elements such as music, colours, and characters associated with Saudi culture were found to be essential for Saudi consumers to remember an ad on YouTube. Consequently, most Saudi consumers are inclined to purchase from a fashion brand if they can recall the brand's ad. While other results in the study indicate that Saudi consumers may not perceive a strong influence from social media ads, these findings suggest that consistent and repeated exposure to impactful YouTube ads does lead to purchase decisions.

Cultural values significantly impact customer acquisition (Sahin, 2014; Kalliny, 2012). A study by AlGhamdi also stress the role of cultural factors in discouraging online purchases among Saudi consumers. In line with this literature, the analysis of our sample data reveals that cultural factors are the primary barriers preventing Saudi customers from purchasing fashion ads on YouTube. The study indicates that fashion advertising on YouTube, aligned with Saudi culture, including Arabic language, music, celebrities, and apparel, is more likely to capture Saudi consumers' interest and lead to purchases.

The study delved into the impact of the Islamic religion on consumer buying decisions, aiming to understand how Saudi culture influences consumer responses to YouTube fashion ads, as Saudi culture is closely intertwined with Islam (Alghamid, 2011). Saudi culture is deeply rooted in Islamic beliefs, customs, and habits, significantly affecting online consumer behaviour (Kraidy, 2009).

While existing literature emphasizes the importance of religion, it doesn't specify which aspects are most pertinent in consumer interactions with YouTube ads. Semi-structured interviews revealed that Saudi customers are extremely cautious regarding Islamic values and will not tolerate content that contradicts their faith. It is forbidden in Saudi Arabia to disseminate information that goes against Islamic values, as this is seen as disrespectful to the Muslim community. Consequently, Saudi customers are unlikely to engage with fashion ads on YouTube that defy Islamic beliefs, and they tend to skip such videos.

Two primary reasons emerged from the sample analysis for Saudi consumers avoiding fashion advertising on YouTube that contradicts Islamic beliefs. First, it concerns the depiction of women and body exposure, with Saudi customers uncomfortable with ads that portray women in

attire that goes against Islamic norms. Such depictions impact their purchasing decisions, particularly if women are portrayed in a manner deemed inappropriate by Islamic standards. While Islamic principles also frown upon men's body exposure, the analysis did not highlight it. Secondly, the main reason for Saudi consumers' aversion to ads that violate Islamic values is the display of sexual scenes or physical contact between men and women. Such content leads Saudi customers to skip fashion ads on YouTube and dissuades them from making purchases from the associated brand.

Recommendations

This section addresses the third objective of providing recommendations for fashion retailers and marketers in Saudi Arabia regarding effective YouTube advertising and its cultural impact on Saudi consumers' fashion buying decisions. The knowledge acquired from the first two objectives informs the insights and strategies for achieving this objective.

The first recommendation is that Fashion retailers should diversify their social media advertising strategy by utilizing multiple platforms. Relying solely on YouTube for fashion brand promotion in Saudi Arabia is ineffective, as most consumers tend to skip YouTube ads within the initial five seconds and report limited influence. Instead, leveraging various social media channels allows ads to reach consumers repeatedly, foster online word-of-mouth, and enhance the chances of Saudi consumers remembering the brand and being influenced by their online network, ultimately driving interest and purchases. Given that many Saudi consumers tend to skip fashion brand ads within the first 5 seconds, and ads are often longer, with some exceeding 2 minutes, it is crucial to make the initial part of the ad as impactful and engaging as possible. Unlike TV ads that cannot be skipped, social media audiences are less patient, so capturing their interest early is recommended to retain their attention.

Additionally, while advertising a fashion brand on YouTube, the video is recommended to feature Arab celebrities since Saudi customers are highly influenced by celebrities familiar to them. Saudi customers are more prepared to buy a product if it is represented by a celebrity they prefer and trust. Celebrities, particularly in the fashion sector, influence consumer purchasing decisions in Saudi Arabia. Further, including reviews and feedback from real customers in a video ad may make consumers more likely to purchase from the brand, given the finding that individuals in Saudi Arabia are often influenced by the endorsement and behaviour of people around them.

Marketers need to be acutely aware of the content they share in Saudi Arabia, as capturing the attention of Saudi customers can be challenging. The data indicates that Saudi customers have strong preferences and aversions when it comes to advertisements. Particularly, they are unwilling to engage with or purchase from fashion advertising that contradicts Islamic standards. Given the profound importance of Islam in their lives, it significantly shapes their purchasing decisions. Therefore, fashion retailers must ensure that their content aligns with Islamic principles and values in Saudi Arabia. Prior research on what is acceptable and prohibited within Islam is essential before planning any ad distribution in the country. In the context of YouTube fashion advertising in Saudi Arabia, it is vital to present content that respects Islamic values, portrays women by Islamic norms, and abstains from any physical or sexual content, as these are prohibited in Islam and would not be accepted by most Saudi consumers.

Finally, it is recommended that Ads should be culturally familiar and relevant to Saudi culture and its people. The more an ad resonates with Saudi consumers, the more likely they are to engage with it. Ads should be in Arabic, the primary language in Saudi Arabia, as this facilitates effective communication with the target audience. Furthermore, incorporating Arabic music, clothing, and Arab celebrities is recommended, as they are highly appealing to Saudi customers. In sum, fashion retailers and marketers should ensure that their ads incorporate elements that are relevant and familiar to Saudi consumers to maximize their effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this paper has explored the nature of YouTube advertisements and their potential influence on Saudi consumers' buying decisions from the Saudi cultural perspective, specifically in the fashion industry. The overall aim of this research was to understand and analyze the cultural impact of social media advertising on consumers buying decisions within the fashion industry in Saudi Arabia, by focusing on YouTube advertisements. This research has addressed the highlighted gaps in the literature through primary data obtained through interviews and has provided new insights into YouTube advertising as a tool to influence Saudi customers' buying decisions. The results of the study show that Saudi consumers' buying decisions resulting from fashion YouTube adverts are highly influenced by five main factors: 1) Islamic foundations, 2) Celebrities, 3) Language, 4) Online word of mouth, and 5) Consistency and repetition. Through the recommendations developed from the study findings, it is hoped that this research will contribute to best practices when presenting and selling fashion products on YouTube in Saudi Arabia and consequently support increased user purchase intentions.

Limitations and Further Research

This research is not without limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the research whilst providing in-depth insights was limited in terms of representativeness. Therefore, quantitative research would be useful to further validate the findings. Second, the scope was only limited to fashion, so future studies could explore whether the results of the current study also hold in other markets in Saudi Arabia.

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