YOUNG SAUDI FEMALES AND SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING
An Empirical Study

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Abstract:

As social media continues to attract hundreds million of users around the world, marketers seek out to use social media as a venue for their marketing messages. It is important to understand what consumers on the receiving side of the ads think about those messages displayed on social media sites. This study examined social media usage, perceptions and behaviors of females' students towards advertisements displayed on social media sites. A questionnaire survey was administered to 223 female undergraduate students at king Saud University. The study gave mixed results, that the majority of students are fully aware of advertising on social network sites.

Almost half of the respondents stated that they follow; being a friend or fan of a company page and they mostly have a good perception about companies' presence on social networks site. Credibility, entertainment, and informativeness were identified as significant positive predictors of Saudi females' attitude towards social media advertising while irritation have very minimum (non-significant) negative influence on the attitude towards social network advertising.Convenient sampling technique and the generalization are main limitations associated with the paper

Keywords: Social media marketing ; Consumers perception; Consumers attitude; Saudi Arabia; Females.

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1. Introduction:

With the rapid development of information technologies worldwide, there are many options for Marketers to promote products and services. Advertising on social media is one of the most suitable promotion techniques in today's business environment for focusing on their marketing goals. The growth and usage level of social media have become a worldwide phenomenon. Social media are increasingly attracting the marketer's attention, not only because of massive regular user base and rapid growth, but also because of its huge market potential for advertising. Social media advertising is one type of advertising that particularly uses social media as the platform to deliver messages to their targeted customers. Arab world as well as Saudi Arabia has witnessed a magnificent expansion in social media usage during the past few years. According to the Arabs Social Media Report (2014) the penetration of social networking is increasing in the Arab region with more than 71 million active users of social networking technologies. Facebook and Twitter are the most popular online social networking sites in Arab region. The total number of Facebook users in the Arab world, as of end of May 2013, was 54,552,875 users and 3,766,160 **for Twitter** (Arab social media report, 2014). The penetration rate of Facebook **in Saudi Arabia is 18.26%**, which makes it occupies the **30th place** in the ranking of all Facebook users by country. Saudi Arabia has the highest number of active twitter users with 1.9 million users, which accounts for over half of all active twitter users in the Arab region. Although internationally female presence in social media (if we take Facebook, as an example) equal to male , this trend, however, does not hold in the Arab region, where only a third of Facebook users are women equal to 32% in 2014. This is still significantly lower than the global trend, where women constitute 61% of Facebook users. As of **Saudi Arabia** there are **69% male** users and **31% female users (Arab social media report, 2013).**

While businesses continue purchase online advertising and create social networking profiles to brand themselves, it is important to understand how consumers react to advertising on this new channel. This will help advertisers understand the ways in which online advertisements perceived. For advertisers looking to capitalize on the size of the online social

networks and increase their presence, an examination of attitudes toward online advertising formats in social network websites is critical. For the advertising has to be effective, end-users have to perceive the

The purpose of this study is to investigate young female user's attitudes toward social media marketing in Saudi Arabia, and to identify the main factors that underlie the formation of their attitudes. More specifically the objectives of this paper are:

1. To explore the attitude and perceptionof Saudi females' (positive or negative) towards social media marketing
2. To investigate the relationships between social media marketing characteristics and consumers' attitude towards socialMedia marketing

2. Attitude towards Social Media Marketing

Assessing the effectiveness of advertising is prime concern for both the academics and the practitioners, who studied the advertising across different media from various perspectives and investigating on what factors might affect the effectiveness of advertising. For example, the research showed that one of the important variables that measure advertising response is attitude (Mackenzie& Lutz, 1989). Attitudes are the way that the individuals perceive the environment surrounding them and make corresponding reaction to it (Aaker et al, 2010). Attitude could also refer to a general assessment by an individual by having a favorable or unfavorable perception with regards to a given object.

Attitude towards advertising is "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner towards advertising in general" (Mackenzie& Lutz, 1989). Understanding consumers' attitude towards advertising is very remarkable and critical; particularly for advertisers, as attitude toward the advertisement and the way it is perceived by consumers, determines its success (Mehta, 2000). According to Mehta (2000),consumers with a more favorable attitude towards advertising were more likely to recall the brand and be persuaded by advertising. Stevenson et al., (2000) found that poor attitude towards the advertisement was associated with poor attitude towards the web site and weak purchase intention.

Factors influencing attitude toward social media marketing:

Factors found to be influencing attitude towards online advertising have been explored in several studies. Ducoffe (1996) found that informativeness and entertainment are strong portions on Internet advertisement that interviewees indicate. Azeem & Haq (2012) point out that beliefs about online advertising in terms of informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and economy had a positive effect on attitude towards advertisement. Kamal & Chu (2012) examined social media usage as well as beliefs, attitudes and behaviors towards advertising on social media in Dubai, UAE. The results indicate that beliefs are positively related to attitudes, which consequently predict behaviors toward social media advertising. Moreover, another research work (Luo, 2002) finds out that informativeness, entertainment, and irritation of Internet advertising have influence on attitude, Internet usage, and customer satisfaction. It concludes that consumers who perceive the Internet as entertaining and informative generally show a more positive attitude towards the Internet advertising.

Logan et al (2012), compared female students' perceptions of the value of advertising on social network sites to their perceptions of the value of television advertising. They found that the respondents assessed advertising value on the basis of entertainment (higher for social media) and enformativeness (higher for television).

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The current study applies Ducoffe (1996) and Brackett and Carr (2001) framework ofconsumers' attitudes towards advertising on the Internet. Ducoffe (1996) identified four factors as characteristics of social media advertising that might affect attitude towards social media advertising. Ducoffe's (1996) model shows that informativeness, entertainment, and irritation are threeelements of the characteristics of advertising, which influence consumers' attitudetowards Internet as a medium of communicating advertising messages. Brackett and Carr (2001) extend Ducoffe's model by adding credibility as one of the characteristics of Internet advertising that might affect attitude towards social media advertising. As all of the advertising on social media is carried out on
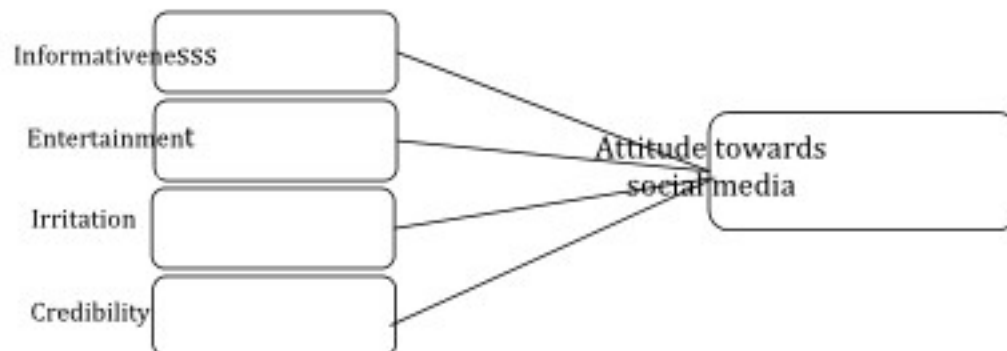
Internet, they share some of common characteristics of Internet advertising as what Ducoffe and Brackett and Carr found out. Several past studies found Ducoffe belief framework effective in measuring consumer attitudes toward online advertising

4- Methodology:

Design:

The study uses qualitative analysis in order to gain insights into Saudi females' attitude towards social media advertising. A cross sectional self-administered survey was used to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of twoparts. The first part includes five demographical features: age, gender, education, occupation, and hours of social media usage, social media membership, and social media usage experience as well as questions that measure their perception of social media marketing.The second part consisted of the five-point likert scale measures social media marketing characteristics and factors affecting the respondents' attitude, having Likert scale of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Most of the measurement items were adapted from previous research. The scale for the factors credibility, informativeness, entertainment and irritation were adapted from Ducoffe's (1996) and Brackett and Carr (2001). Meanwhile, measures of attitude were adapted from Fishbein and Ajzen (1980). Frequency, reliability, and regression analysis were tested in this study. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study.

Fig. 1 : The Conceptual Framework

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Based on the above framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Informativeness of social media advertising message will positively affect females' attitudes towards advertising on social media

H2: Entertainment of social media advertising message will positively affect females' attitudes towards advertising on social media

H3: Irritation of social media advertising message will positively affect females' attitudes towards advertising on social media

H4: Credibility of social media advertising message will positively affect females' attitudes towards advertising on social media

The Sample:

Data were collected from a convenience sample of female students at king Saud University in Riyadh. Using a student sample in this study is important because college students comprise a demographic most likely to be internet users in Saudi Arabia. According to Arab Social Media Report (2010) Youth (between the ages of 15 and 29) make up 67% of Facebook users in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the members of this age group are the main users of the Internet and social media. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed, 223 subjects completed and returned the questionnairewith a response rate of 89%.

5. Analysis and Discussion:

Demographic Analysis:

A random sample of 223 undergraduate females was recruited from king Saud University (female campus). All of the participants were aged between 18- 25, and most of them were single (76%). Most of the sample (78 %) has access to internet and social networks from their homes and 56% from mobile devices. Table (1) shows that all participants use at least one of the social networks sites.Almost 92% of the participants declared that they have been using Internet for more than a year.Concerning their usage rate, 47.5 % of the respondents spent 2-3hours daily on their preferred online social network, while 18% spent 4-5 hours and 7 percent more than 5 hours per day. However, those who spent less than an hour per day represent 55 percent of the sample. Respondents asked to specify the main reasons to why they engaged with social network sites, the respondents stated a different number of purposes. The most frequent purposes of using social networks sites by the participants are exhibited in the study. The participants

use social networks sites mostly for the purposes of entertainment (72%), communicating with friends and relatives (50%), to get information about products and services, (46%) and communicating with new friends of common interests (46%).

Table 1:
Sample characteristics

Experience in using Social Networks Sites	N	%
More than a year	207	92.8
6 month- 1year	4	1.8
Less than 6 month	3	1.3
Less than a month	9	4.0
Social Network Membership		
You Tube	177	79
Facebook	135	61
Twitter	122	55
Google+	72	32
My Space	6	2.7
LinkedIn	3	1.3
Other	22	9.9
Number of Hours Students Spent on Online Social Networks		
about than an hour a day	55	24.7
2-3 hours a day	106	47.5
4-5 hours a day	41	18.4
More than 5 hours a day	16	7.2
Purpose of Using Social Networks Sites		
To keep in touch with friends and relatives	109	50
Communicating with new friends of common interests	58	26
Product and services information	103	46
Entertainments	160	72
N= 223		

The second set of questions aimed to explore therespondents evaluations of social networks marketing, first we examined how noticeable are

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advertisements displayed on the social network site pages to the users. Respondents were asked if they noticed the advertisements displayed on the social network pages, if they pay attention to it, and what characteristics or content attract their attention to them. Data in Table 2 showed the summary statistics for the Sample Perception and behavior towards Social Media. From this data, we can see that 20% of the respondents always notice the advertisements displayed on social network pages, 53 % stated that they sometimes notice the advertisement and 27% stated that they rarely notice the advertisement on the social network pages. These results proved that the majority of students are fully aware of advertising on social media sites. The Advertisement awareness measure showed how many of the respondents that were exposed to the ad actually remembered seeing at least one of the ads on their social media pages. The results showed that 44% of the respondents stated that they had seen the advertisements displayed on their page and most often gained their attention and read them. However, 37% ignore the advertisements displayed on their pages. They stated that while they were aware of advertisements, they tend to ignore their presence, which is referred to as "banner blindness."

With regard to the online advertising effectiveness, a widely used measure for evaluating the effectiveness of banner advertising is the click-through rate, that is, the proportion of viewers who click on a banner to visit the advertiser's website (Hanson 2000). While Briggs and Hollis (1997) and the Millward Brown Interactive Study (1997) proved that banner ads do not need to be clicked in order to be effective, a click is an indication to the advertiser that their ad has had even more impact on the web user. A click-through defined as the end-user responding to the displayed advertisement through clicking on it and in so doing actively searching for more information. A click is an indication to the advertiser that the advertisement has had even more impact on the web users. Therefore, respondents were asked if they have ever clicked on an advertisements displayed on their pages, and if so, what it was that motivated them to do so. The results show that 19% of all the respondents in the sample stated that they had clicked on the ad for more information.

Table (2)
Sample Perception and behaviour towards Social Media

Advertisement Awareness	N	%
I always notice the advertisements displayed on social network sites	44	20
I sometimes notice the advertisements displayed on social network sites	119	53
I rarely notice the advertisements displayed on social network sites	60	27
Behaviour when exposed to advertisements		
Get their attention and read them	99	44
Click for more information	42	19
Ignore it	82	37
Reasons for following a company page		
Attractiveness of the advertisement	37	16.6
Discounts and offers	55	24.7
Knowledge of the company and its product	62	27.8
Recommended by a friend	24	10.8
Perception of Social Network Site		
Good	155	**70**
Bad	4	**2**
No effect	64	**28**
The influence of Consumers Reviews on purchase Decision		
Always	99	44
Sometimes	93	42
Rarely	31	14
Always	99	44

Many companies make pages for their brand to interact with their consumers. The results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that 41 % of the respondents stated that they follow; being a friend or fan of a company page while 59% stated that they did not follow companies' pages. When asked about the reason why they follow a company page, 17% stated that they had been attracted by the company advertisements, 25 % for the company offers and discounts, 28 % stated that they follow the companies' pages because they know the company and the quality of their products. Interestingly, only 10%stated that it was recommended by a friend.

Understanding online social network sites users, and how they perceive advertisements displayed on those sites is important for both academics and marketers. A greater understanding for users' perceptions will lead to improvements of advertising plans and decisions. To explore their perception towards social networks marketing, the respondents were asked about their perception of the companies that have social networks pages. The results displayed in Table 2 showed that 70% of the respondents have a good perception about companies' presence on social networks sites. Only 2% have a negative perception and 28 are neutral.

Internet as well as social network sites offers the fastest and most convenient channel for consumers to exchange information, opinions, experiences and personal evaluations of purchased products or services and thus facilitate word-of-mouth communication among consumers. Such exchanging behavior is regarded as the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) defined eWOM as 'any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet'. Bristor (1990) mentioned that word-of-mouth is the approach to obtain others experiences through the interaction of social network which is normally thought more neutral and more reliable, because it is mostly generated directly by consumers rather than by advertisers. SNSs represent an ideal tool for eWOM, as consumers freely create and disseminate brand-related information in their established social networks composed of friends, classmates and other acquaintances (Vollmer & Precourt (2008). Purchasing decisions are being influenced by word-of-mouth product reviews on the social network. Therefore, Word-of-mouth

plays a very important role in consumer behavior and it has the effect on consumers' decisions of long-term and short-term procurements (Dolen et al., 2007). According to an October 2008 survey by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, a research and consulting firm, 70% of Americans say they consult product reviews or consumer ratings before making a purchase, (*Business Week*, Oct. 2008).

To investigate the influence of online customers' reviews respondents were asked to indicate whether their decision of purchase influenced by reading the customer reviews about a product or services displayed on social network sites. The results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that almost half of the respondents 44% stated that they are always influenced by reading consumers reviews in their purchasing decision. 41%stated that they sometimes influenced by reading consumers reviews in their purchasing decision. While only 13% stated that they rarely read the consumer reviews. According to a new survey conducted by Dimensional Research (2013), an overwhelming 90% of respondents who recalled reading online reviews claimed that positive online reviews influenced buying decisions, while 86% said their buying decisions were influenced by negative online reviews. Thus, it becomes very important for marketers to understand the underlying pattern of online consumer review and to consider how firms can exploit their marketing mix to affect consumers' reviews

Hypotheses Testing:

Reliability Analysis:

The Cronbach Alphas are computed for reliability testing. All the items for each construct of the study possess Cronbach α value above 0.70. The reliability of all constructs met the recommended standard of 0.70 suggested by Nunnally (1978) which means that the scale is highly reliable (Table 3).

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Table (3)
Results of Descriptive Statistics & Reliability Test

Constructs/Measure	Mean	SD	α
Informativeness (2items)	3.948	.840	0.72
Entertainment (2items)	3.219	.987	0.89
Irritation (2 items)	2.984	1.12	0.78
Credibility (2items)	2.588	.977	0.88
Attitude towards the social media marketing(3items)	3.452	.796	0.80

Attitude towards Social Media Marketing:

This section of the questionnaire required respondents to give information on their perception and attitude towards social media advertising, three items adapted from Fishbein and Ajzen (1980) were used, with rating from 1 as "Strongly Disagree" to 5 as "Strongly Agree", therefore the higher the rating result the more positive attitude of respondent holds. As the 5-point Likert scale is used to present the perception of attitude, then if the rating is greater than 3 it would be positive attitude, otherwise it would be negative attitude. Based on the responses from the data collection, the results in Table 3 indicates that the average rating of attitude towards social media advertising is 3.45, so the respondents hold overall positive attitude towards social media advertising.

Factors Affecting Attitude towards social media marketing

In order to test the hypothesis and investigate the factors that might affect the respondents' attitude towards social media advertising, multiple linear regression analysis was carried out. Based on the path coefficients presented in Table 4, infomativeness, (β= .157, p, .009);   entertainment, (β = .252, p, .000); and credibility (β = .365, p, .000), have a significant positive influence on the attitude towards social network advertising whereas irritation (β = -.064, p, .279), has a very minimum (non-significant) negative influence on the attitude towards social network advertising. Therefore, hypothesis H1, H2 and H3 are supported whereas hypothesis H4 is not supported. Moreover, the value of beta coefficients for credibility shows the

strongest positive relation and therefore can be considered as the most significant antecedent for attitude towards social network marketing. Therefore, credibility, entertainment, and informativeness respectively should be considered as the antecedents to Saudi females' attitude towards social media marketing.

Table 4:
Regression Analysis

Constructs	Beta	t	Sig.	
(Constant)		5.073	.000*	R= .63
Informativeness	.157	2.642	.009*	R^2 =.40 %,
Entertainment	.252	4.028	.000*	F=35.697
Credibility	.365	6.198	.000*	P=.000
Irritation	-.064	-1.086	.279	

Dependent Variable: Attitude towards social media advertising   Predictors: Informativeness, Entertainmer Credibility, and Irritation.

*Significant at 1% level.

6. Conclusion:

Since few studies have been done on social media marketing in Saudi Arabia, the present study was designed to explore and measure the attitude towards social media marketing. The results show that Saudi females have a positive attitude towards social media marketing, therefore companies can target these consumers by enhancing their advertising activities on social networks. Moreover, the study also investigated and discussed whether factors such as Informativeness, Entertainment, credibility, and Irritation could affect Saudi female attitudes towards social media.

This study has identified Credibility as the variable with highest impact on Saudi females' attitude towards social media advertising, followed by

Entertainment then informativeness. These findings confirm the findings of previous research (Ducoffe, (1996); Brackett & Carr,(2001); Zafar& Khan,(2011); Mahmoud 2012a, 2012b). These results indicate the importance of credibility variable when assessing attitude towards social media advertising. Therefore, marketers should give priority to the credibility aspect in order to optimize the results of their social media marketing. The most interesting finding was that irritation (β = -.064, p, .279), have very minimum (non-significant) negative influence on the attitude towards social network advertising. This finding was unexpected and suggests that social media advertising is not irritating for Saudi females. This result is in agreement with those obtained by Logan et al., (2012).These findings have significant implications for the understanding of how Saudi females perceive social media advertising.

There is limited research available for marketers to understand social media users' attitude that help them to design targeting strategies that enhance their customer relationship management with existing and potential consumers via the social media platform in the emerging markets, especially in the Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia. This study provides needed insights into Saudi female consumers' attitudes toward social media advertising. As such, the study may enhance marketing professionals' understanding of social media advertising audiences, and thus help businesses and organizations employ social media advertising more effectively and efficiently in their marketing efforts.

While the study presented several insights into social media advertising, some limitations existed. First, the study examined a limited sample of female students from Saudi Arabia. The small sample size did not allow generalizations and fair representation. Moreover, the sample of students was not representative of females' social network and Internet users. Therefore, it would be valuable to conduct future research using more representative subjects, (male and female social network users from different backgrounds not limited to university students). Recommendations for future research also include using other quantitative methods to empirically measure consumer attitudes toward social media usage for marketing and communications.

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