

The impact of brand positioning and social media advertising on consumer purchase intention; an empirical evidence from fast food industry in Oman

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Abstract - Fast food industry in Oman is poising a continuous growth with a number of well-established fast food chains in the country. The progression of the fast food industry is embraced with a variety of domestic and international brands. For customer retention, exploring the buying preferences of customers is always of key importance for the business managers. This research explores the impact of brand positioning and social media advertising on the consumer purchase intent of fast food items. It has explored the effect of various social media advertising strategies undertaken by the fast food brands to attract and retain the potential customers. It's a survey based research study, in which 180 questionnaires were distributed among customers of different fast food restaurants in Muscat city. Through the careful analysis, it is revealed that the dissemination of good advertisements on social media produces a powerful impact on the purchasing decision of fast food consumers in Oman. Also most of the customers visit a fast food restaurant with pre-defined mind set based on their previous experience or some other influence.

Key words: Brand positioning, Consumer purchase intention, fast food industry, Social media advertising

technologies on desktops and laptop and create highly interactive platforms where individuals, communities and organizations can share, discuss, modify, or publish content. Networks formed through social media change how people interact and communicate (Kietzmann, Jan H.; Kristopher Hermkens (2011). People, especially youth in Oman, are potentially impacted by social media advertisements.

II. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Digital media have opened up many new channels of communication and have given companies an opportunity to develop a closer relationship between consumers and their brands. As consumer awareness increased in terms of market offerings and brand comparisons, companies started focusing to distinguish themselves from the rival brands. In order to increase consumer purchasing of the product, companies are designing a distinctive image of their product to seek consumer attention (Aaker, D. 2013). The powerful brand continues indefinitely to create consumer loyalty through continuous engagement. It is evident that with the development of technology, many social media programs and applications have emerged and are followed by a number of people all over the world. The most famous among these are: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube. Most of the companies are exploiting the means of social communication for promotion and dissemination of their products among

I. INTRODUCTION

A brand is an innovative symbol or guide used by an organization or individual to investigate that the services or products provided to the consumer are based on a single source on which the trademark appears. Some of these sections exist and are grouped in the brand name, image, design, symbol, phrase or logo. However, there are some non-traditional sections that can make up a trademark such as those that depend on smell or color (Brewster Kahle, 2012). Branding supports the long-term goals of the organization by creating a clear vision for the organization's objectives. It is based on a set of rules and principles that earn a personal name and a functional independence out of other existing brands. Customers' preference of one product over another, irrespective of the price, reflects the impact of branding on that customer. Therefore brand positioning distinguishes a brand in the mind of customer from other products, and this tends to represent what that brand has gained from its personality and respective association. The configuration of the brand highlights the solid reputation in the market through which it attracts the customers and retains them for a long period of time. There are two basic ways for branding strategy that are sought for its competitive advantage. One is through driving price where the other is competition or differentiation (Bruce Gilliat, 2011). Social media has emerged as a strong mean of communication between communities and people all over the globe. Users frequently access social media services through web

3. To evaluate the relative impact of brand positioning on consumer decision making.

SCOPE OF STUDY

With the advancements in information and communication technologies, a change in decision making style of the customers is witnessed in almost all industries. Advertising the products and services is relatively easier and more frequent through social media. On the other hand, it allows users to share information, photos, videos and share instant feedback about each other's experiences. In this context, this research study is aiming to evaluate the potential impact of social media advertising and brand positioning on the fast food customers in Oman. Evidences from the historical perspective are narrated to strengthen the nature and significance of the research. The users of fast food restaurants in Muscat, Oman are engaged in collecting primary data through a structured questionnaire. Data is analyzed through the relevant tests of SPSS and results are discussed in detail. The findings of the research can be helpful for the international chains of fast food restaurants operating in Oman as well as can provide good insights to the owners of traditional restaurants in the Sultanate not focusing much on their presence at social media platforms.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

BRAND POSITIONING

Brand positioning is the process of creating an image of the brand in the minds of its potential customers. This is a common practice in best-selling brands, i.e., owning a place of advertising for a brand, product, or service using different strategies such as pricing, quality enhancement, promotion, distribution, packaging and labelling. The goal is to create a unique impression in the customer's mind so that the client is linked to something specific and desirable that differs from the rest of the market. There are seven basic steps to clarify the company's position effectively in the market: 1 - Determine how to put your brand now. 2. Identification of direct competitors. 3. Understand how each competitor puts its mark. 4. Compare your site with your competitors to identify and evaluate yourself. 5. Develop an idea about different sites and rely on value. 6. Formulation of a declaration to determine the status of the trademark. 7. Test the effectiveness of the trademark statement (Nunaly and Bernstein, 1994). There are four key elements in the best positioning statement: 1. Target customers: What is a brief summary of demographics and a description of the target group of customers that the brand is trying to attract? 2. Definition of the market: What category does the brand compete for and what is the context of the customer's brand? 3. Brand Promise: What is the most useful (emotional / rational) urgency for target customers who can have a brand for competitors? 4. Why honesty: What is the most convincing proof that a brand fulfills its commercial promises? (Jeffrey Moore, 2015). There can be a difference between what a product is and what the target customers actually think about or consider

masses in a much faster way. Also it's easy to use social media by remaining in touch with the recent updates about their favorite brands. Consumers are actively engaged on the social media platform and not only decide about purchasing specific products but also share their post purchase experiences with others. Although most of the international fast food restaurants in Oman have their presence on social media but some traditional restaurants are still not interacting much with their customers through these channels.

The temptation of youth towards fast food products is not very old in Gulf particularly in Oman. But in recent times, the customers of fast food have grown in numbers and youth is among the largest segments for buying the fast food items on routine basis. In Oman, the use of social media is influencing the masses, particularly youth, and adding layers of information about the new market offerings. This study focuses on investigating this effect of social media advertising and brand positioning on the consumers of fast food in Oman. However, the challenge remains to develop brand recognition, relevance and perceived quality to let consumers know how the brand works for them and what impact their advertising appeals create on their potential customers.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The social phenomena described in the following research study comprise elements of consumer behavior in online environments to evaluate the impact of advertising through social media networks on the consumer's purchasing decision. The key issue this study aims to address is whether the consumers of fast food in Oman are impacted by any social media advertising campaigns and if so then whether it results in driving them to purchase the product or not. There are many studies that exhibit the consumer's behavior in purchasing is influenced by the brand of the product (Leire, 2009). Therefore this study is also investigating the relative impact of brand positioning on the purchasing decisions of Omani customers. This can help a number of advertising agencies and owners of fast food restaurants to focus and prioritize their advertising campaigns through social media to cultivate awareness and interests among their potential customers in addition to their traditional marketing channels.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to analyze and determine the status of the brand positioning and social media advertising in context of their relative impact on the purchase intention of the fast food consumers. The key objectives of this research study are following.

1. To explore the implications of brand positioning and social media advertising in relation with the fast food industry.
2. To investigate the influence of social media advertising on fast food customers in Oman.

items have increased in number in past few years with a key focus on youth including both citizens and expats. This tremendous growth of the fast food industry has attracted more investors and franchises to open or expand their branches in the country.

CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

Declared intentions for consumer purchases are key inputs used by marketing managers to predict and identify future sales. If companies want to beat their competitors, they should make consumers love to buy your products and brands. In this case, brand awareness remains an important factor influencing the purchasing decision of potential customers. When consumers want to buy a product, brand awareness can affect the decision with a better knowledge of the brand (Grewal, Monroe & Krishnan, 2009). The model presented by Engel, Blackwell and Miniard 1995 divides consumer decision-making into five stages: (1) problem identification, (2) information search, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) purchase decision and (5) post-purchase behavior. In addition, (Moen and Minor, 2001) maintain that consumer decision-making is a series of treatment outcomes based on recognition, research on problems, solutions, assessment of alternatives, and decision-making. In practice, variables used in current research have been derived from several studies. In particular, there are two earlier researches which can be considered to be the major references in defining the current theoretical framework, i.e. H. Chen (2014), Kim, Gupta and Li (2005). Chen (2014) has conducted a study on the particular impact of social media on sociability, usability, dependency, and involvement in consumer behavior, including perceived risks, perceived values, and confidence in buying intent. On the other hand, the perceived price may have directly influenced the buying intent of repetitive consumers (Jacoby and Olson, 1972, 1977, Urbany, 1997, Kim, Gupta, and Li, 2005). Openness, speed, dependency, perceived value, perceived risk, and perceived price are recognized as independent variables, while purchase intent is set as a dependent variable for further research analysis. In contrast, Reibstein (2002) found that price is an important factor in getting potential customers to buy products locally. According to Reibstein, the price becomes a repeat customer when he buys a product at the same location. Zeithaml (1988) points to this price as a quality indicator.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study is based on a quantitative survey where responses are obtained from the selected sample and analyzed quantitatively (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The quantitative research suits well with the nature of this research with an objective of collecting systematic empirical evidences from the target customers. To collect

it. The conceptual place owned in the minds of potential customers defines the positioning of that particular brand.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

With the emergence of the World Wide Web in 1989, the Internet has become a global network. Since then, also known as the Information Age, the volume of available content has changed. Dramatically, the use of social media networks played an important role. There are several definitions of social networks like "Social media is a kind of online medium that speeds conversation rather than traditional media, which provide content but does not allow readers / viewers / listeners to participate in the creation or development of content." There is a wide range of social media networks including YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook etc. The communication on social media gained strength in the initial period of twenty-first century by allowing individuals to create and consume information immediately over the internet. Facebook began to develop and expand its video production capabilities, increasing the number of online ad clips and drawing the attention of advertising companies as well to which experts considered a positive development for the company. (Hensel, Kyle, 2010). Now in addition to the traditional form of advertising, marketers are using social media platforms to engage, educate and update the customers as well as to build strong relationships to grow their businesses. It is relatively easier to find and interact with most of the customers on social media for a deeper understanding of their buying behaviors and getting formal informal feedback.

FAST FOOD INDUSTRY IN OMAN

Oman is one of the oil-rich countries in the Arabian Gulf. Infrastructure, luxury hotels and food chains under global influence are fully developed. The distinctive focus of Muscat, capital of Oman, is on local endokai, called *karak*, which ranges from local ingredients such as fish, chili and coconut used by the local and international chefs to taste fresh Omani dishes across the world. The enriched culture and temptation of people towards fast food items has attracted here the franchises of world-famous brands. These restaurants are geared to excellent cuisine. McDonald's Oman received its highest paid QSR survey, which was recently conducted by a leading regional research firm. The Golden Arches franchise was a great success in the Market-I survey in all categories of fast food restaurants. In result, the brand's reputation in the fast food industry in Oman and throughout the region has been further strengthened. In terms of market share, McDonald's was ahead of its competitors both in the Sultanate of Oman and across the Middle East. Overall, households, young people and other age groups of all nationalities visit fast food and other restaurants quite frequently to enjoy the food of this region. Particularly the consumers of fast food

Respondents of the study were inquired about the number of times per week they visit fast food restaurants in Oman. The frequency of their visits is shown in Table 3. Results reflect that 41% of the customers prefer to visit their favorite fast food restaurants once a week whereas 34% visit the restaurants twice or thrice in every week.

Visit	Frequency	Percentage
Once a week	45	41%
2-3 times	37	34%
More than 3	27	25%
Total	109	100

Table 3: Frequency of Visits

CORRELATION

Pearson Correlation coefficients are revealed in Table 4 indicating a strong correlation between the chosen variables. P value shows that there is enough evidence to incur that correlation exists among the population.

Correlations			
		Brand Pos.	Social Media Adv.
Brand Pos.	Pearson Corr.	1	.513**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	109	109
Social Media Adv.	Pearson Corr.	.513**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	109	109

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

RELIABILITY MEASURE

To measure the internal consistency, Cronbach Alpha is tested and the results are exposed in Table 5. The value indicates high level of internal consistency with respect to the sample.

Hence its revealed that the overall reliability coefficient

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	52	47%
Female	57	53%
Total	109	100

for the given items is consistent.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.791	22

Table 5: Reliability Statistics

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Linear regression analysis is conducted for brand positioning and consumer purchase intention in Table 6. R

the information from the respondents, a structured questionnaire in both hard and soft forms were distributed among the customers of fast food restaurants located in Muscat, Oman.

SAMPLING

Through simple random sampling technique, 150 questionnaires were distributed among the customers of different fast food restaurants in Muscat, Oman including McDonalds, KFC etc.

It was made sure that customers are representing most of the fast food chains in the capital. From the distributed questionnaires, 109 questionnaires completed in all aspects were considered for data analysis. To establish a fully representative sample, the responses of customers from different genders, age groups and nationalities were included in the study.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Although some relevant studies can be found endorsing the structure of the research in terms of investigation, but the findings were not very clear or directional. Therefore this research study increases the strength of findings according to the given hypothesis. Based on the literature review and objectives of the study, this research assumes certain relationships among the chosen variables as stated below.

H1: Advertising on social media positively influences the purchase intention of fast food customers.

H2: Brand positioning generates a positive impact on purchase intent of the fast food customers.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The following Table 1 depicts the gender distribution among the sample of the study where 52 males and 57 females participated in the survey. Overall 53% of the female respondents filled the questionnaire.

Table 1: Gender Distribution

In terms of age distribution, sample represents different age groups ranging from 14 years to more than 32 years of age. As reflected in the frequency, more number of respondents were aging from 19 years to 22 years reflecting the attraction and trend of youth towards fast food items in Oman. The detail of each age group in terms of frequency and percentage can be examined in Table 2.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
14 to 18 yrs	29	27%
19 to 22 yrs	36	33%
23 to 27 yrs	19	17%
28 to 32 yrs	12	11%
32 Greater	13	12%
Total	109	100

Table 2: Age Distribution

ratio of fast food consumers in Oman is increasing and particularly young customers are growing in number. As the use of social media has become so common, therefore customers in Oman are strongly influenced by the social media advertising of the fast food restaurants in terms of new offerings, promotions as well as pricing. Also it is revealed that most of the customers visit the fast food restaurant with a pre-decided mind set based on their previous experiences and affiliations with the brand. Both the hypotheses of the study are proved and strong nexus is found between the purchase intention of Omani customers and the advertising done by the fast food companies on social media. Also the brand positioning is proven to be very crucial for converting the awareness of the customers into purchasing decisions.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Few limitations are linked with this research study. This research was based only on fast food industry in Oman. Different results can be obtained if this study is conducted on other industries in the Sultanate. Respondents for this research were selected only from Muscat in context of the available resources. Based on the time constraint, sample size was relatively small. In future researches, sample size can be increased by including more expats and investigate in-depth that may testify the findings of this study. The brackets of age groups can be increased in future studies. More variables can be included in future studies and even the moderating effect can be examined. The comparison of results in terms of different social media platforms can also provide good insights for future researchers. .

VIII. CONCLUSION

The research has concluded that advertising on social media and brand positioning produces a significant influence on the consumers of fast food industry in Oman. It is revealed that the social media is no more used only for communication and gossips but it has turned into a powerful tool of impacting the buying decisions of the customers. Not only the marketing managers of international fast food chains but also the owners of traditional restaurants can capitalize the opportunity to increase their number of customers in Oman through their better engagement with customers on social media. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram and other social media tools are regularly followed by a number of customers in Oman and heavily influence their decisions to buy different products. Nowadays artificial intelligence is an emerging tool exercised to enhance customer engagement and offer efficient services that eventually results in stronger relationships.

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value is representing a high correlation between two variables whereas R square is showing that 57.9% of the relationship with dependant variable can be explained by the independent variable.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.773 ^a	.579	.591	704.075

Table 6: Regression Analysis

The significance value in the following table is indicating the statistical significance of the regression model.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Reg.	18.502	9	2.056	1.778	0.000
	Res.	114.471	99	1.156		
	Total	132.973	108			

Table 7: Anova

Linear regression analysis for social media advertising and consumer purchase intention is shown in Table 8. R value is representing a very high correlation between two variables whereas R square is showing that 66.1% of the relationship with dependant variable can be explained by the independent variable which is very high.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.846 ^a	.661	.622	817.613

Table 8: Regression Analysis

The significance value in the Table 9 is indicating that statistically the regression model overall is significant.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Reg.	11.782	9	1.056	1.709	0.000
	Res.	123.221	99	0.956		
	Total	135.003	108			

Table 9: Anova

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The core objective of this research was to investigate the potential impact of social media advertising and brand positioning on the purchase intent of the customers in fast food industry in Oman. The ease of communication for customers at one hand whereas the competition among brands on the other hand has seemingly increased the need of strong presence on social media platforms for not only fast food industry but for the operators of other businesses as well. The results in this study clearly reveal that the

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