Social Media Influencers and Consumer Behaviour: Online Shopping Trends among Saudi Women

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Abstract. Through empirical investigations of collaborative practices, this research seeks to dissect the influence of social media influencers on the online shopping behaviours of Saudi women, a topic that has been relatively understudied in the existing literature. The objective is to advance the domains of CSCW and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) by investigating the consumer online shopping practices, particularly how they are influenced by social media influencers and cultural contexts. It aims to understand how cultural and technical aspects impact digital shopping experiences in this specific context. Saudi Arabia, known for its unique blend of traditional and contemporary elements, provides an excellent context for studying the impact of the design and influencer marketing on women's online shopping purchase decisions. The study explores the impact of cultural perspectives, especially from Saudi Arabian culture, on HCI design with the goal of improving the inclusivity and worldwide relevance of technological solutions. This research strengthens the field of HCI by highlighting the need of considering cultural sensitivity in design. Moreover, it enriches our understanding of consumer behaviours across different global contexts, emphasizing the insights from non-Western perspectives such as those in Saudi Arabia.

1 Introduction

Social media use has dramatically affected how people communicate and interact with one another and how they receive information and news. Furthermore, it has changed customers' behaviours; for example, customers now often consult reviews and other people's opinions on social media (Alshammari and Almansour, 2020; DePaula et al., 2018; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). The affected activities include consumer intention and the actual buying behaviour. This change has made a significant impact on how marketing businesses manage their campaigns and ads and how people decide and make a purchase. A critical phenomenon that has taken place in social media communities is the introduction of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) - "online personalities with large numbers of followers, across one or more social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or personal blogs) [who] influence their followers" (Varghese and Agrawal, 2021). They have a significant impact on people's daily choices, including purchasing habits (Arora et al., 2019). Furthermore, SMIs usually specialise in a particular area to increase the consumers' trust in their opinions about a product or service (Hall, 2016; Lou and Yuan, 2019). This literature review aims to focus on the broad trends in relation to SMIs, consumer buying behaviour and purchase intention, while indicating the contextual gaps that have emerged in non-western cultures and specially in the contexts of Saudi Arabia.

2 Literature Review

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) is a dynamic and interdisciplinary field that has witnessed considerable evolution over the past 40 years. It integrates a range of disciplines including Sociology, Psychology, Communication, Human Factors Engineering, and Industrial Engineering, reflecting its broad scope and multidisciplinary nature (Gurcan et al., 2021; Jinjuan et al., 2017). The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) conceptualizes HCI as concerned with the creation, assessment, and application of interactive computing systems designed for human use, as well as the investigation of significant phenomena surrounding them (Hewett et al., 1992). This definition underscores the field's commitment to improving the interface between humans and computers, highlighting its relevance in the digital age.

Research within HCI has transitioned from a machine-centric to a human-centric approach over the last six decades, with Gurcan et al. (2021) emphasizing the shift towards online communicative technologies and social media. This pivot is significant, considering the pervasive impact of social media on contemporary human-computer interactions.

In the rapidly evolving field of HCI, current research keenly explores the interaction between social media interfaces and user experiences, particularly emphasizing the critical role of cultural nuances in designing accessible and user-friendly platforms (Cao and Loiacono, 2019) for diverse global audiences, including those in non-Western contexts like Saudi Arabia.

Emerging research also delves into Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and their profound influence on followers, exploring themes of trust, platform governance, and the professionalization of influencers (Ki et al., 2022; Han et al., 2021; Niu et al., 2021; Establés et al., 2019; Weber and Ludwig, 2021). Studies like those by AlArfaj et al. (2019); Ahmed AlArfaj and Solaiman (2022) extend this inquiry to specific cultural and regional contexts, examining how trust in platforms and HCI design considerations impact consumer buying behaviours in places like Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, research by Weber and Ludwig (2021), alongside studies focused on the purchasing behaviours of young adults influenced by SMIs (Croes and Bartels, 2021; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017), contribute to understanding the nuanced effects of social media within HCI. These studies collectively underscore the importance of HCI research in navigating the complex interplay between technology, social media, and different cultures, offering insights into the potential for HCI to shape and enhance the digital interactions.

3   Research Questions

This research seeks to evaluate the impact of social media influencers on the online purchasing behaviours of Saudi women. The Main Research Question: To what extent do social media influencers impact the online shopping behaviours of Saudi women?

- RQ1: How do social media influencers in Saudi Arabia integrate e-commerce elements into their online content to influence the purchasing behaviours of Saudi women?

- RQ2: How do cultural preferences and values of Saudi women mediate the influence of SMIs on their purchasing decisions, particularly within the context of online endorsements and social media interactions?

- RQ3: What design implications can be derived for e-commerce platforms based on their influence on the purchasing decisions of Saudi women?

- RQ4: How do Saudi women perceive and evaluate their purchase decisions influenced by social media posts?

4 Method

The concurrent parallel design introduced by Creswell (2013) was chosen as a basic mixed-methods design for this work. The convergent parallel design is defined as "concurrent quantitative and qualitative data collection, separate quantitative and qualitative analyses, and the merging of the two data sets" (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). This design was chosen because it provides a complete understanding of the phenomenon, as it covers qualitative and quantitative data that explain each other in depth and in more detail (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Merging strategies in convergent designs has also been described as a varying form of data triangulation introduced by Denzin (1978), which will help to increase the accuracy and ensure the reliability of the results (Harrison et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2017). The qualitative data would be composed of semi-structured interviews and digital auto-ethnography. The transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, along with the diary entries of the digital auto-ethnography would be subjected to thematic analysis. While for the quantitative components of this research, which would include a survey and a sentiment analysis using Natural Language Processing (NLP), two primary modes of analysis will be used. The survey would run through performing statistical analysis. In the case of the NLP, sentiment analysis would be used on the comments sections of social media posts posted online by influencers to gain key critical insights from an NLP perspective regarding Saudi women and their consumer behaviour online. This study received ethical approval from The FST Research Ethics Committee (FSTREC) in Lancaster University, ensuring adherence to the highest ethical standards.

5 Findings

Through this ongoing study, fascinating patterns and trends have started to uncover that are closely linked to Saudi women online consumer behaviour. While the full conclusions are not final yet, these first findings provide a valuable view into the effect of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on Saudi women online shopping behaviours. For example, the early data gathered from semi-structured interviews with Saudi women who follow SMIs and practice online shopping have shown indications of the strong impact of social bonds on the consumer online behaviour among Saudi women. This preliminary evidence implies that the study delves into several interesting themes explained in the following. The study indicates the appearance of the theme 'Influence of Friends and Family on online Buying Decisions', revealing the fascinating convergence of traditional family guidance in Saudi Arabia with the impact of digital influences (Mabkhot et al., 2022). Within the context of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), this discovery

highlights the need of digital interfaces integrating traditional cultural values with the dynamism of current social media (Servidio et al., 2015). Likewise, within the context of the theme 'Parasocial Relationships with SMIs and Building Trust', the important impact of social media influencers is influenced by cultural perspectives on trust and credibility. HCI designers have the task of developing platforms that align with the culturally distinct expectations of users (Kyriakoullis and Zaphiris, 2016). The significance of culturally responsive HCI design is highlighted by the data, emphasising the need for technology to be in integration with the distinct cultural landscape of non-western countries such Saudi Arabia (Jagne and Smith-Atakan, 2006). Regarding the theme of 'Promotion of Online Shopping vs In store Shopping', the research reveals an interesting cultural shift towards online shopping, which may be attributed to the impact of digital marketing tactics (Al Hamli and Sobaih, 2023). This transition necessitates Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) solutions that not only cater to usability but also align with the cultural preferences of Saudi women (Shen et al., 2023). The theme 'Incentivizing Online Shopping via SMIs' highlights the importance of e-commerce platforms including cultural awareness into its design. This ensures that incentives and promotions are both culturally acceptable and successful (Gefen and Heart, 2008). These observations emphasise the important role of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) in creating digital platforms that are not just technically skilled, but also deeply integrated into the cultural background of their users, especially when it comes to involving the growing market of Saudi women (Kumar and Dell, 2018).

6   Future Work

During the next phases of this study, the main objective will be to successfully finish and incorporate various data gathering techniques. The autoethnographic component seeks to give personal insights into the cultural context of online buying behaviours among Saudi women, presenting a distinctive narrative viewpoint (Rapp, 2018). Simultaneously, the work would continue further out with using Natural Language Processing (NLP) to analyse social media content. This will allow to identify patterns and attitudes pertaining to e-commerce and influencer marketing within the Saudi context. Moreover, the examination of survey data will enhance these qualitative observations by providing numerical evidence, enhancing the comprehension of the wider patterns in consumer behaviour. Expanding upon these results, there will be a notable emphasis on understand the implications of HCI design. The objective of this project is transforming the knowledge acquired via the comprehensive research method into actionable suggestions for e-commerce platforms, particularly those focused on the Saudi market in order to cater to the unique cultural and behavioural requirements of Saudi women (Dourish, 2006). In conclusion, a delve into the

broader impact of the findings on worldwide e-commerce strategies and digital marketing practices. Understanding how global e-commerce platforms can adapt to varied cultural settings will be crucial by integrating cultural subtleties in technology usage and customer behaviour patterns. This study is anticipated to make a substantial contribution to both the academic field and practical implementations, providing vital perspectives for the ever-changing realm of digital commerce and technological development (Broeder and Gkogka, 2020).

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