

1-1-2014

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Recommended Citation

Wally, Eman and Koshy, Swapna: The use of Instagram as a marketing tool by Emirati female entrepreneurs: an exploratory study 2014, 1-19.
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/dubaipapers/621>

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THE USE OF INSTAGRAM AS A MARKETING TOOL BY EMIRATI FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Eman Wally and Dr. Swapna Koshy

ABSTRACT

The UAE has an internet penetration rate of over 80% and has utilised social media for social and commercial purposes. This exploratory study is aimed at understanding the experiences of Emirati business women who chose Instagram to market their small businesses. Nine successful businesswomen were identified and their experiences with Instagram were analysed. The study found that Instagram is effectively used by Emirati women entrepreneurs, especially for home-based businesses. Instagram specific marketing strategies were created to ensure brand awareness and customer engagement. The entrepreneurs found Instagram in-expensive and user friendly; it also provided high exposure for their products. The business women relied on relatives and friends to spread information about their products and this mirrors Emirati culture that is based on tribal communities. Instagram also provided a secure private platform for Emirati women as they do not have to mix with strangers, especially from the opposite sex, and this allows them to engage in business freely without any social pressures.

INTRODUCTION

Technology is advancing at a very fast pace, and the world around us is changing very quickly. Most people are now connected to the internet, either through their computers or smart phones. This is causing businesses and organizations to migrate their advertising and customer care to the online world, where it is easier and faster to reach customers. One of the main reasons for this shift is the boom of social media platforms. Social media is a very easy and cost effective way to reach out to current and potential customers. Since smartphones are ubiquitous and help connect to social media while on the move, businesses and organizations are able to reach customers wherever they are.

The Arab World has experienced the impact of social media and this can be witnessed in the changing attitudes and behaviours of people. Social media also proved its massive power in spreading new ideologies during the Arab Spring. Several regional studies have thrown light on the use of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, but with the emergence of Instagram, new aspects of social media were highlighted, one of them was the effectiveness in commercial transactions. Global brands and organizations grabbed the opportunity, exploited its features and capabilities of exposure and transformed the social media application from a socializing medium to an effective tool for marketing. The UAE has a very high internet and smart phone penetration rate and as individuals heavily subscribe to Instagram, many UAE businesses and industries have taken advantage of its benefits. This raised the enthusiasm of some Emirati women entrepreneurs to use Instagram as a tool to market their businesses.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING - BENEFITS

Advertising has evolved in line with the digital shift in recent years and uses new communication technologies to reach target audiences online. Several studies have been conducted in this field to support this idea. Tuten (2008) defined advertising as a bundle of promotional integrated techniques to grab the attention of the target audience whether they are business to consumer or business to business products. Interestingly, she notes that many of the flaws of traditional advertising have disappeared with the advent of online advertising, improving its reach and impact. For instance, traditional advertising targets a mass audience, whereas online advertising can be targeted with tailored messages. Secondly, traditional advertising is usually expensive, which is not always the case with online advertising. Thirdly, traditional advertising does not lend itself easily to creating engagement and interaction which is possible with digital advertising. Therefore, digital marketing enables

marketers to create interesting, engaging messages that can be communicated to a specific target audience relatively cheaply.

As social media is an alternative for expensive and time consuming marketing campaigns small businesses have utilized it well (Benwell 2014). It is a very effective technique in tracking consumer behaviour, which helps to identify new marketing strategies (Tuten 2008). Along with building brand awareness social media gives the brands more credibility as it enhances brand image. Last but not least, the most essential benefit is creating a communication bridge between the brands and the customers. These benefits are usually reflected in the sales figures.

Another important aspect discussed by (Tuten 2008) is the term "Friendvertising". Most social media are based on a friendship foundation. It depends majorly on adding friends or making new friends as on Facebook. These friends can discuss their favourite brands or post pictures of themselves using their favourite brands. This word-of-mouth from friends has a huge positive effect on the brand.

A varied aspect of social media as a "strange mystifying and counterintuitive space" is highlighted by Meyerson (2010, p14) ; he explains that it is all about people, and people are puzzling. Social media is all about understanding what triggers people as individuals and in groups. He also states that social media has the six persuasive psychological forces embedded in it, which are:

- Reciprocity: humans by nature are obligated to repay favours, gifts and invitations
- Social proof: the unintentional look for approval from the society for our actions
- Liking: being liked by online users affects sales positively
- Authority: it is human nature to respect and obey any form of authority
- Scarcity
- Commitment

Lee and Kotler (2011) delineated the difference between types of communication channels or media channels. They mention three types; mass, selective and personal. *Mass media* channels are used when the marketer wants to quickly reach large groups of people. *Selective* channels are used when marketers want to reach a target audience through targeted channels like direct mail and social media. On the other hand, *personal* channels are very expensive but much more effective as the

customer feels he is being treated specially.

Lee and Kotler (2011) also emphasized the push and pull technique, to grab the audience that use traditional communication channels such as advertising, public service announcements, special events, printed materials, special promotional items, signage and displays and personal selling and push them to use the new marketing channels or the nontraditional options such as Facebook, YouTube, blogs, online forums, texting, Twitter, Instagram and mobile phones and websites.

Discussing target audience Diamond (2013) pointed out that finding the right target adds power to social media, as addressing the wrong segment will be a waste of time. On the contrary spending time in identifying the right niche would ease the planning process for a successful marketing campaign. Diamond (2013) also highlighted the importance of visuals in any marketing campaign online. The best image options can be a picture of the product, website images, event pictures, customer testimonial pictures. Diamond affirms that when combining text and graphics together it creates an effective tool for communication called “infographics” (Diamond 2013, p149). Social media marketers started using infographics in 2012 as it is an entertaining and easy way of delivering a message. It is easier to understand than lengthy texts. More important is that they can be easily shared on social media channels such as Instagram.

INSTAGRAM A VIABLE MARKETING TOOL

Instagram is a recent development and not much research is available that primarily focuses on the platform. *Instagram Power: Build Your Brand and Reach More Customers with the Power of Pictures* by Jason Miles (2013) is one of the few books on the topic. Miles emphasizes that Instagram is an effective tool to reach the consumers. Today 5 million photos are shared on Instagram on a daily basis. Miles (2013) states that nowadays 50% of the top brands use Instagram as a marketing channel. It works flawlessly on mobile phones as the application was designed originally for mobiles. It has an easy to use platform with minimal conversation. Adding to that, images on Instagram have a longer life than on any other social media network.

From the functionality perspective four main factors were identified. The first one is comparing Instagram to other social media. Miles (2013) compared Instagram to the most popular social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest and Twitter

in terms of time and energy required, and virality. Despite the fact that Facebook purchased Instagram in April 2012 for \$1 billion cash and stock, and it supported and offered integration to Instagram, the two platforms are still competing with each other. In comparison Instagram is much easier to use and in terms of followers' expectations, Instagram's users are satisfied with only sharing some pictures daily with minimal description while Facebook followers need more intensive participation. The only medium that has a better advantage than Instagram in terms of visuals is YouTube. 52% people feel more confident about a product when they watch a video about it. There is also a 74% increase in the likelihood of buying a product when shoppers view videos. 70% of the top search lists are videos.

Pinterest is based on the exact same idea of picture-sharing as Instagram; however the main difference is that Instagram has the option of editing and improving the picture quality before sharing, while Pinterest is a traditional website to share interests. In terms of time and energy required both applications are successful if marketers spent 10 to 20 minutes daily. In terms of follower's expectations, both sites do not need intensive conversations or interaction. In terms of virality, the amount of audience engagement is similar (Miles 2013).

Instagram and Twitter also have more similarities than differences. In terms of time and energy required, while Instagram does not require a conversation after snapping the picture and uploading it, Twitter followers expect conversations and participation, sharing, commenting and responding. A tweet can live for only a few minutes; while a picture posted on Instagram can stay for a month. (Miles 2013).

Instagram is a medium designed especially for visuals, its capability to easily share photos on social platforms contributed to its tremendous growth. Diamond (2013) stated that in 2012, smartphone users spent more time on Instagram than on Twitter. Instagram shares most of the features that other popular social networks have including profile, followers, hashtags, push notifications, and location tags. Its built-in filter tool which allows users to add their own stamp on their photos distinguishes it from all other social media networks. A good marketing plan would be accomplished by integrating the use of Instagram with other social media networks for longer brand exposure and better audience reach; specifically in terms of the migration of followers from one social media platform to another (Miles 2013).

Costill (2013) suggests that all industries could use Instagram as an effective marketing tool. Delo (2013) observed that Michael Kors (MK) grabbed the opportunity and was the first brand to advertise on Instagram. A month later, General Electric, Levis, Lexus and Ben & Jerry's followed MK and posted their first ads on Instagram. Although the only determining factors of the target audience was age and gender, which were collected from Facebook when signing up, the results of the ad campaigns were remarkably successful, with hundreds of thousands of likes and new followers for the brands. MK's ad attracted around 34,000 new followers after 18 hours of posting the advertisement. Ben & Jerry's ad gained 249,000 likes and around 6,500 comments after four days. Lexus's advertisement also had 185,000 followers and 6,000 comments (Delo 2013).

Instagram has already started to measure the effect of content on audiences in order to determine the effectiveness of ad recall and brand awareness (Miles 2013). The CEO of Track Maven, which conducted research on Instagram as a promotional tool, confirmed that the most interesting discovery was the use of hashtags. This emphasized that Instagram is more of a discovery social media tool than a visual one. This means that people will search for the content they want which guarantees a successful relation between Instagram and businesses (Costill 2013).

On a different note Dunn (2013) stated that Instagram is also facing the risk of losing its uniqueness and becoming similar to other social media applications. Recently, Instagram introduced 'Instagram direct' to its bundle, and in the same week Twitter added images in mobiles. Dunn predicts that gradually the social networks will start to lose their uniqueness. He disapproves of the fact that social media are drifting away from the concept that each platform should provide one unique feature, resulting in increased efficiency. The adding of different features and tasks to each social media platform will result in four or five applications that are nearly identical. He argues that Instagram started with its unique feature and that is photo-sharing. This is what distinguishes it from other social media and makes it unique. But if it starts to look similar to other social media applications, marketers will duplicate their campaigns and spread them on all the social media channels they are using with only little customization. This would definitely be more time, energy and cost efficient for marketers, but they will lose the most important factor in advertising and that is creativity. This will gradually result in less innovation, fewer risks taken and the brands would all look the same with no possibility to stand out.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN THE UAE

In an outstanding study that highlights the effect of social networks in the UAE Al Tenajji (2010) stated that the presence of the UAE on online social networking is significantly increasing. Research conducted by a market intelligence firm on the hospitality sector found that 46% out of a sample of thirteen thousand social networking users were in the UAE. This shows that the UAE stands in the third place globally in terms of social networking sites membership ahead of USA and Canada. In the UAE the hospitality sector took the lead in this online presence. Hotels such as the Intercontinental Hotel in Dubai Festival City use social networks to resolve customer complaints. In addition, the hotel posts competitions on Twitter with lucrative prizes such as nights in the Presidential Suite or spa packages. Al Tenajji (2010) carried out a survey on a sample of 120 people of which 48% said that UAE organizations reached out to them through social networks. The other 62% stated that they came across organizations that use social networking. When they were asked what was the type of communication that those organizations used social media for, the result was 23% advertising, 19% increasing brand awareness and 15% for communication. This has prompted malls too to establish their presence online; Dubai Mall has 477,000 fans on their Facebook page, 66,000 followers on Twitter and 31,000 followers on Instagram.

The tourism and hospitality industry in the UAE is heavily using Instagram to the extent that every five star hotel in the UAE has an Instagram account. Madiha Zakir, the social media manager at UAE Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, confirmed that Facebook and Twitter are leaders in terms of consumer engagement, but Instagram is continuing to show a positive growth. "Because of its visual, Instagram is a key marketing tool for us this year," she said (Padovani 2014). On her blog Digitaltalks.me Dheeraj Saraswat (2013) stated that following hotels popular brands in the UAE used Instagram to build a strong relation with its customers and attract more followers. McDonald's Arabia has 160,898 followers while Topshop Middle East that has 42,000 followers. Top Shop is combining two marketing strategies by posting celebrities pictures wearing Top Shop clothes. Benefiting from audience engagement and celebrities testimonials Top Shop is creating one of the most effective marketing campaigns.

EMIRATI WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

About 4-5 decades ago when men in the UAE used to be out at sea for months, the

women would run small businesses of their own to raise money for themselves and their families. After the country started generating income from oil revenues, most Emirati women no longer needed to work purely for the income. Nowadays, women entrepreneurs are on the rise, motivated by other reasons and objectives.

The Dubai school of government (2011) in its Arab social media report stated that Arab women's role has been changing along with the growth of the social media. Social media has aided the empowerment of Arab women by leading them to a new form of leadership by using social connections and networks. Arab women are not only active on the internet but are also becoming active participants on social networks and forums. A vivid example is Saudi Arabia's "Women2Drive" campaign. This opened new opportunities for Arab women with regards to entrepreneurial opportunities.

In another study, Churchill (2013) mentioned that the number of Emirati women who are establishing their own businesses dramatically increased last year. Many Emirati female entrepreneurs who started their businesses early are flourishing now, and they have set a model for others to follow. Churchill confirms that the UAE ranks first in the Arab World in terms of supporting and facilitating the start of any business, with the Dubai Economic Department witnessing an increase of eleven per cent regarding business registrations and license applications since 2011. Diaa (2013) confirmed that there is a rapid growth in the number of Emirati businesswomen too with an increase from 0.1 percent of the UAE workforce in 2001 to 1.4 percent in 2006. However, Diaa (2013) also highlighted some of the challenges that women can face. These include lack of confidence to take risks, the lack of access to knowledge and the ignorance of the methods to acquire funds. The fear of risks usually comes from social pressure, lack of bankruptcy law and the expensive cost of launching a new business. In line with that, a study conducted on 224 Emirati women by Iman Sherif (2012) tries to identify the factors that motivate Emirati women to start their own businesses. Sherif (2012) affirms that Emirati women are self-motivated to work, as they feel the urge to contribute their efforts to the growth and development of their nation.

Emirati women have excellent conditions to start their own businesses. They are living in a country where a myriad business opportunities are available along with the support of the government. Moreover, Sherif (2012) states that an average of 18 per cent of women use starting capital from their own families, which eliminates the need to approach banks and financial institutions for loans. Also, the proximity of family members and the close knit family unit greatly helps as women can leave their children with them while she is assured that they are in good hands.

Education is another factor that can motivate Emirati entrepreneurs to start their own

businesses. Sherif (2012) claims that 77 per cent of Emirati ladies continue their studies to higher education and 57 percent of Emirati female entrepreneurs have degrees or have completed post graduate studies. Hans (2004) confirmed that most of the Emirati women entrepreneurs are well educated; two thirds either had bachelor or Master's degree, which encourages them to explore the business world supported by their knowledge.

Another study also added the interesting fact that 48 per cent of the UAE's women entrepreneurs who were surveyed were the solo owners of their businesses, and they had been in the field for an average of 5.9 years. This result is larger than similar ventures in the USA (Indrupati & Henari, 2011). Hans (2004) emphasized that a large amount of the women surveyed had received specialized training programs in business and management skills funded and supported by the UAE Government through non-profit organization such as Umm Al Moumineen Women's Association in Ajman, Khorfakkan Women's Association, Abu Dhabi women's association, Business Women Council Dubai, Businesswomen council in Sharjah and Mohammad Bin Rashid Establishment for young business leaders. Sherif (2012) also points out that the governmental support is another factor that motivates and supports Emirati women entrepreneurs in the UAE. Financial help is provided through the Ministry of Commerce and the Federation of the UAE Chamber.

It is clear that the UAE puts a special focus on women entrepreneurs, as two new organizations were launched in 2006 aiming at sustaining business women. "Forsa" or "Chance" is an organization that helps women investors to manage and direct their investments of above one million Dirhams. For smaller investors, "Enma" or "Development" was founded and helps investors starting from Aed 1000 (Indrupati & Henari, 2011).

Other studies reinforce the idea that the UAE focuses on women entrepreneurs. Sambidge (2013) states that Abu Dhabi initiated a World Economic Forum under the theme of supporting women entrepreneurs by creating a competition under the name "Fikrat" (meaning "My Idea" in English). This was designed to accelerate the entrepreneurial culture among Emirati women. Gutcher (2014) mentioned another form of support by highlighting the partnership between the global payment company Master Card and Dubai Business Womens Council. They founded "Ro'ya" (Vision) organization, which selects eight business proposals done by women. These eligible eight women would receive coaching and mentoring sessions to help them develop a business plan. Moreover, the eight candidates would also receive financial support. There are three top prizes, the first one worth \$50,000, the second is \$30,000, the third is \$20,000 and the other five are \$5,000 each (Gutcher 2014). Diao (2013) found that

Emirati women entrepreneurs are expected to leave a powerful imprint in Dubai Expo 2020, which will elevate the value of the exposition and highlight a highly civilized society that empowers their women.

Emirati women rely heavily on social media networks to market and advertise their merchandise and businesses as they can reach the desired consumer easily and effectively unlike traditional advertising techniques. And since their main consumers are their family and friends, there is no better way to reach them than through Instagram and similar platforms (Hans 2004).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed method. Primary data collection was done through in depth interviews of nine female Emirati entrepreneurs who consented to participate in the study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The content of the interviews was analysed and a thematic analysis was performed. A Grounded Theory approach was taken where open and selective coding was done to identify theoretical samples. Secondary data was collected from academic and trade journals, books, databases and newspaper reports.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The participants' ages range from 14 to 45 years. Each of their incomes exceeded AED10,000 per month. Those over 21 years held bachelor degrees. Five of the participants promote Emirati sweets, two sell audio books, the others own business selling Emirati dresses and Abayas and homemade soap. All of them use Instagram as their basic marketing tool. Due to the ease of preparation and the availability of raw materials local sweets sells best on Instagram. Check what does Instagram have to do with it or is it that food business is easier. In soap manufacturing the business owner has to import some of the ingredients from other countries.

The first two participants, who are promoting audio books, do not have over 250 followers, which is a small number compared to the followers for Emirati sweets where the number of followers ranges from 900 to 16880. The nature of the product plays a crucial role in the consumer's acceptance, the closer the product is to Emirati culture, norms and traditions the faster it acquires a reputation and finds its way to the local consumers. Products such as Emirati sweets, which are a main element in gatherings and Emirati dresses, which are used daily are easy to promote as it depends mostly on the posts and reposts. Products such as audio books are a totally new concept in Emirati culture. Participants who are marketing their books are

aware of the challenges. Participant 1 stated that in her situation “Instagram works as a platform to show her talent, develop it and improve it.” She also pointed out that book businesses in the UAE and the Arab world is not profitable as the demands for books are limited. Participant 8 explained that her limited number of followers is due to the product being new to the UAE and it is usually hard for a new product to succeed.” It is a main feature of the Arabs that they do not like change“.

DATA ANALYSIS

Instagram and small businesses

The term Small Business can refer to the capital seed and the number of employees. Businesses can also be classified as small based on sales, assets, or net profits and it depends on the country’s economic system. The size of the business is an essential attribute based upon which the communication goal and strategy are set.

In this study, all the participants admitted that though the source of financial support differed their capital seed did not exceed AED10,000. In such small businesses the main goal of marketing is brand awareness and to build a brand name and reputation as well as attracting customers to try their product, Hopkins and Turner’s (2012) confirm that whatever was the size of the business, organizations have to follow any path that enable them to reach their audience, but then the only thing that varies is the goal of communication itself.

The medium size business owned by participant 9 who makes soap brings a net revenue of AED25,000 per month. This business is relying on Instagram for more than brand awareness. It’s principle goal of communication will be to hold customers’ attention and engagement. For this reason the owner posts the soap making process along with photos of her kids in the lab, which gives the product a personal touch. In big businesses where brands such as Coca-Cola have already built their reputation over the years, Instagram is still a good opportunity, not only to go with the flow but also to keep the consumers loyalty. It also helps to keep a reciprocal communication channel open between the organization and the customers (Hopkins and Turner 2012).

Small businesses on Instagram target mainly the instant buyer who follows the product and buys with a single click.is this what you meant? Global brands are targeting another segment of consumers, which are the shoppers who like to stay updated about the latest products and fashion trends. In their case, Instagram works as a catalogue or magazine, which enables them to make the buying decision at home and go get the product from a brick and mortar shop. is this what you meant? This is the case of many premium global brands such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Prada and so on.

The dependency on family for financial support seems to follow a trend as four of the participants prefer to rely on their family financially rather than applying for a bank loan. The government is playing a crucial role in supporting small businesses especially for women who lack male sustenance, which is the case of three of the participants. The most important characteristic of Instagram that made it convenient to use for marketing by small businesses is the fact that it is free of charge. The second Instagram feature that made it suitable for small businesses is that there are no governmental regulations or taxes on the advertisements which make it the most convenient medium to use in promoting their products. Studies that have been conducted on Emirati business women applauded the role of the government in supporting small entrepreneurs especially from a financial perspective which, is confirmed in this study also.

Instagram in close-knit social groups

Five of the business owners started to promote their products through the use of their personal account while the other four realized the necessity to create a separate account for their projects. This helped them to measure the real effect of advertising and the size of success. Participant 3 stated that she was making dresses at first only for her mother and sister. They posted their pictures in her creations and this caught the attention of customers. Participant 4 has a similar story. She was making sweets for her friends who in turn posted pictures on Instagram accompanied by the participant's phone number for orders, and it worked out. "First my Instagram account was private and I added only people that I know personally. When my first story was released, my friends started to post and repost to friends, just like word of mouth. The next day I got 200 followers!" Participant 2 said. Many of the participants pointed out the importance of relating the business on Instagram to their family names. As a tribal society the family name plays an essential role in acquiring the consumer's trustworthiness.

Selling to strangers

In a previous study that focused on the challenges that Emirati women face in the market, entrepreneur Diaa (2013) mentioned two inner obstacles which are lack of confidence to take risks and social restrictions and pressures. Emirati entrepreneurs find it better to sell through Instagram as all the commerce takes place on the products' account page and through the WhatsApp application. Instagram works with WhatsApp? They do not have to deal with customers directly, as dealing with strangers of the opposite gender is a matter of discomfort to Emirati ladies.

“I think Instagram removed the embarrassment that many Emirati women suffer from while dealing with strangers or men as there is no direct contact” Participant 2 mentioned.

“I think Instagram made it easier for everyone, I don’t have to deal in person with every customer” agreed Participant 3.

On the other hand, participants believed that selling to strangers or people outside the family circle reflects the success of their marketing strategy as they reached the customers and built up a positive reputation.

“Actually it is better to sell to people that you don’t know personally. It means that your product is successful; strangers will not buy from you out of courtesy. If we sell to people outside our acquaintance circle, it means we have a very strong reputation and it is a great sign of success“ - Participant 4.

“It is a positive sign that people who don’t know us in person buy our products, it means that we successfully reached our target and we have a good reputation in the market” added Participant 6.

The fact that Instagram derives its success from the cultural emphasis on family and social groups which is a basic feature of the Emirati society is non-negotiable. The Emirati culture and tradition is strongly based on the tribal concept all for one and one for all. All the participants highlighted the importance of the family support not only for finances but also on the emotional front. All of them had family members as their first line customers. Six of the participants are running a family project; seven of the participants said their family and friends were helping them in marketing their products through posting them on their personal pages. Others mention it to friends and share with them a picture of the product.

This comes is in line with the concept of “Friendvertising“, mentioned by Tuten (2008) which highlighted the profound effect of friends discussing brands or posting their pictures using a particular brand. Friends are usually a trustworthy source of information and they are also the corner stone on which the whole concept of social media was built up. So a word from a friend is worth a million ads.

“Through Instagram, we send some gift samples to well- known people, key persons as famous bloggers who have huge number of followers and they promote our products through their personal accounts on Instagram. It is a kind of indirect marketing,” Participant 4.

Instagram and cultural features

The male presence on Instagram cannot be ignored. Despite the fact that none of the participants tailor their advertisements to cater to a particular gender or to target a

specific audience segment, males tend to be serious buyers on Instagram as participant 6 mentioned. All participants have male followers. They tend to be either buyers or silent followers. They are not active in terms of likes or comments or reposts.

The growing divorce numbers, polygamy and spinsterhood that the Emirati society suffers from, made the establishment of independent business a necessity for Emirati women. They prefer to have a secure back up source of income, from which they can also derive their power and equality to men especially in the market. Owning businesses is as important as education today for financial security.

Use of other social media

Various previous studies have shown a decline in Facebook and Twitter usage among Emirati women. All participants have an account on Facebook and Twitter which they do not use as frequently as they use Instagram. Facebook appears to many of them crowded and complicated while they use Twitter for serious and political conversation. On the contrary, Instagram appeals to most of them as the leading social media network and the most convenient for commercial and promotional activities.

For their marketing strategy, four of the participants use an additional medium besides marketing on Instagram, while the other four depend only on Instagram. Participant 9 combined three tools of marketing to enhance her marketing plan; she relies mostly on Instagram, but did not stop using BBM. She was also interviewed on many TV shows but she admitted that people did not usually see it unless she posted the link on Instagram.

Instagram works also as a supportive tool to push customers to other media. For example by posting a link customers can be directed to YouTube or Face book .

When asked about future promotion tools in case of business expansion, seven of the participants confirmed they were expecting the emergence of a new mobile application that will take Instagram's place and were looking forward to working with it.

Followers and Buyers

Most of the followers are buyers. Follower's include competitors and fans. The measurement unit of any business, whatever its size, is the revenue which can be estimated through the buyer's appeal. On Instagram the number of followers can reflect the quality of the product and the success of the business but may not reflect the actual sales figures(Miles 2010).

Participant number 3 pointed out that entrepreneurs can exchange followers for more

exposure. She also stated that one of the marketing techniques on Instagram to build a reputation is to buy followers. Most of the participants agreed that the number of followers cannot represent the number of buyer's as it may include fans, competitors and people who are following them out of curiosity.

The reason behind choosing Instagram as a marketing tool

	In-expensive	User friendly	Audience engagement	Social prestige	Free of Regulation	Similar to Catalogue or magazine	Better exposure (widely)
P1	✓	✓					✓
P2		✓		✓			✓
P3		✓			✓	✓	✓
P4	✓	✓					✓
P5		✓					✓
P6		✓	✓				✓
P7		✓		✓			✓
P8	✓	✓					✓
P9	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

As the table above shows all participants agreed that Instagram is the most user friendly mobile application and the easiest one for advertising, as it does not consume time or effort. In addition to that, it does not need any professional skills. All participants also agreed that it is the best way to reach their customers as most members of their society used Instagram. Four of them pointed out that advertising through Instagram is for free so they do not have to worry about advertising budget. Two participants mentioned the power of the audience engagement and its positive effect on the products and the sales figures. Two others highlighted the fact that many entrepreneurs use Instagram to go with the flow, riding the latest wave of technology and to elevate their products to the same platform as other global brands. Two of the participants stated that Instagram has no regulations or restrictions on advertisements and it is tax free. Two others view Instagram as an interactive catalogue or a magazine where you can see the products from all aspects, ask about the prices and details, and order at the time that suites you.

CONCLUSION

The study has found that Instagram was efficiently used by Emirati women entrepreneurs, especially for home-based businesses. Numerous marketing strategies were created to ensure brand awareness and customer engagement. The most highlighted feature of Instagram was the fact that it is in-expensive and user friendly, as well as providing high exposure for the products. The basic idea of relying on relatives and friends mirrors the Emirati culture that is based upon tribal communities. It also provides Emirati women the privacy they need without mixing with strangers, especially from the opposite sex, and this allows them to practice their business freely without any social pressures. Several interesting cultural facets were revealed during the study and the researchers hope to pursue this further. It could also be extended to a larger cohort. Use of Instagram by male businessmen could also be explored. It would be interesting to replicate the study after an interval of time as the social media trends change constantly and more applications can emerge while others can disappear.

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